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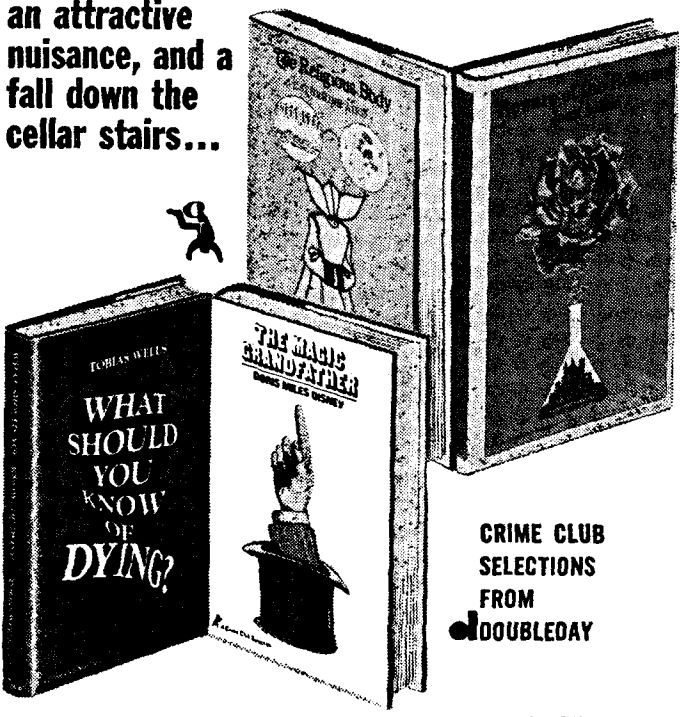

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One of the cleverest and most entertaining stories about Mom, the Bronx housewife with a son on the New York Homicide Squad who, during Friday night dinners, tells the details of his baffling cases to his "'mayvin' of a mother" . . .

MOM AND THE HAUNTED MINK

by JAMES YAFFE

"IT'S MY PERSONAL OPINION," MOM said, "that mink is overrated. I've been wearing it for years, and believe me—"

"With all respect, Mother," said my wife Shirley, "I've been in this family over seven years, and I can't remember *ever* seeing you in mink. In fact, you don't even own—"

"All right, I wouldn't argue with you," Mom said. "If you say I never wore mink—if you say I'm getting *meshuganer* in my old age—it must be the truth. After all, which one of us graduated from Vassar College?" Then Mom took another sip of noodle soup, and sighed, "It isn't as good as what I make at home."

It was a very unusual Friday night. Mom's kitchen stove was being fixed, so she couldn't give Shirley and me dinner up in the Bronx. Instead we were taking *her* to dinner at Fingerhood's, the fancy kosher restaurant near Times Square.

The crowd here was a mixture of sharp Broadway and elderly middle-class. Mom studied her fellow diners with the same penetrating, positively dissecting gaze that she gave to butchers while they weighed her meat. It was the couple in the corner —a little baldheaded man in his fifties and a tall blonde in her twenties, buried in furs—who caused Mom to make her remark about mink.

And of course Shirley couldn't leave the remark unchallenged. After seven years of challenging Mom, Shirley still won't admit that she's outclassed. And so—though *I* couldn't remember Mom ever wearing mink either—I quickly changed the subject. "Talking about mink," I said, "we got a crazy murder case over the week-end."

Mom's eyes lighted up. Nothing makes her forget small injuries faster than a chance to hear about one of my cases at the Homicide Squad. "So maybe you'll tell me about it?" she said.

I started right in. "This Mrs. Laura McCloskey is the wife of Dr.

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Alfred McCloskey—he's an old-fashioned G.P., one of the vanishing breed. For years he and his wife have lived on the West Side in a three-story brownstone which he bought back in the thirties. The top two floors are their home, and the ground floor is his office. The neighborhood isn't what it used to be, but I guess he doesn't want to sell the house and move elsewhere. He makes a fairly comfortable living, but nothing spectacular. That's why he never bought his wife a mink coat until recently."

"She's been wanting one for a long time?" Mom said.

"For twenty-five years, since they got married, according to Dr. McCloskey. She hasn't exactly nagged him about it—he was very careful to explain that—but he could tell how she felt every time they passed a mink coat on the street or every time she mentioned one of her friends' mink coats. Well, I never knew a woman yet who couldn't get her wishes across without coming right out and expressing them."

"It's strictly self-defense," Mom said. "I never knew a man who wouldn't automatically say no if a woman asked him for something right out."

"Anyway, Mom, a couple of months ago Mrs. McCloskey had a birthday, and the doctor gave her a mink coat. For years he'd been saving for this, and he took out a bank loan for the difference, but he still couldn't have managed it without getting an unexpected break. One of his patients told him about Madame Rosa, a wholesale fur dealer who sometimes has unusual bargains to offer. Dr. McCloskey went down to Madame Rosa's place and bought a mink coat that had just come in. It wasn't cheap—he paid close to five thousand dollars for it, but it would've cost three times as much at any retail store."

"Strictly a legal transaction, I hope?"

"The coat wasn't hot, if that's what you mean. Dr. McCloskey found out its whole history from the wholesaler."

"That's Madame Rosa?"

"Actually it's a man named Harry Schultz, who lives in Englewood, New Jersey. He uses the trade name Madame Rosa, in honor of a fortune-teller in Atlantic City years ago who advised him to go into the fur business. Well, he explained to Dr. McCloskey that the mink coat was part of the estate of Oscar F. Tannenbaum, a stock broker who died a little while ago. This coat was the last thing Tannenbaum ever gave to his wife, Janet—then his investments failed, he lost all his money, and he jumped off the terrace of his Park Avenue apartment.

"Mrs. Tannenbaum was forced to sell all her possessions to pay off her husband's debts. There was a public auction, and she sat in the back of the room. When the mink coat came up for sale, she lost control of herself and started bidding on it herself.

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She didn't have a dime, you understand, but the auctioneer just couldn't make her stop bidding. When the coat was finally bought by Madame Rosa—that is, by Harry Schultz—Mrs. Tannenbaum screamed at him that he had no right to it, it was hers, and she'd never let any other woman wear it. Then she collapsed—some kind of stroke—and the next day she was dead.

"And that's the coat's history, as reported by Harry Schultz. We've checked it out, and it seems to be accurate. The auction house, incidentally, valued the coat at fifteen thousand dollars, though they're not obliged to tell us what Harry Schultz actually paid for it."

"And Mrs. McCloskey was happy with her mink?" Mom said.

"At first the doctor was afraid she wouldn't be, because he had picked it out himself, without consulting her. But he wanted the gift to be a surprise—and luckily she loved it. It made her as happy as a girl. First she hugged him and kissed him, then she burst into tears, then she put on the coat and posed in front of her mirror for an hour. And that night she made him take her out to a restaurant so she could show off the coat—even though it was too warm for furs."

"So much emphasis on material possessions!" Shirley said. "No wonder this story has a tragic ending."

Mom turned to Shirley. "If Davie offered you such a material possession right now, you wouldn't take the risk?"

I broke in quickly, before Shirley could commit herself. "Dr. McCloskey told his wife the coat's history—all about the auction and Mrs. Tannenbaum's outburst—and his wife made a funny remark. 'I do hope the poor woman wasn't serious about her threat,' she said. 'I hope she doesn't decide to come back from the grave—' She laughed, although Dr. McCloskey could see that a tiny part of her wasn't really joking.

"But he didn't think twice about it. His wife was the kind of person who goes to seances, follows her horoscope in the daily paper, believes in mindreading and crystal balls and so on. After twenty-five years of marriage Dr. McCloskey didn't pay much attention to her superstitions."

The waiter came to take away our soup bowls and bring our main courses, so I had to stop my story. The waiters at Fingerhood's are the most accomplished story-killers in New York.

The waiter went away, and I started in again. "A couple of weeks later a funny incident took place. Mrs. McCloskey and the doctor were about to leave the house for a dinner date. She asked her maid—that's Berenice Webley, a colored girl in her late twenties—to fetch the coat for her. The maid went to the bedroom closet, and a moment later she called out, 'I just can't

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seem to get this coat off the hanger!'

"Mrs. McCloskey went to the closet too, and tugged at the coat, but it stuck fast. 'It's as if something was *holding* it on there,' she said. Finally Dr. McCloskey gave a hard pull, and the coat came off. 'The hanger must've got caught in one of the sleeves,' he said—though he says now that he wasn't really so sure; when he yanked at that coat, it actually did feel as if some force were yanking back. Then his wife said, 'Well, as long as it isn't that Mrs. Tannenbaum carrying out her threat—' But she was too embarrassed to finish her sentence."

"And well she might be," Shirley said. "A dead woman haunting a mink coat! I've never heard of anything so absurd!"

"Dead women can act very much alive sometimes," Mom said. "My nephew Jonathan is still a bachelor, because his mother don't approve of modern girls—and his mother's been dead for eighteen years."

"A week later," I went on, "there was another funny incident. Mrs. McCloskey belonged to a literary club—a group of middle-aged women who meet every Thursday afternoon at one another's homes and discuss the latest best-selling books. Most of the ladies have more money than Mrs. McCloskey—their husbands are successful businessmen or professional men who aren't quite as idealistic as the doctor. For years Mrs. McCloskey was one of the few members of the club who never wore a mink coat to any of the meetings. So naturally, now that she finally owned one, she had to show it off on Thursday afternoon.

"The meeting was held out in Scarsdale, at the home of Mrs. Alonzo Martineau—her husband is a big surgeon with a Park Avenue office. There was always a kind of feud between Mrs. McCloskey and Mrs. Martineau, probably because both husbands are medical men. The first time she saw the mink, Mrs. Martineau made a remark about how pleased she was that Dr. McCloskey's practice was doing so well these days—and Mrs. McCloskey answered that her husband's practice had always done well, only she didn't believe in boasting about such things the way *some* people do.

"Well, a few hours later the meeting broke up, and the ladies left the house and started down the front walk to their cars. Mrs. McCloskey came a little behind the others, in order to be next to her friend Mrs. Harmon, the banker's wife, who was going to give her a ride home. Mrs. Harmon is an elderly lady, and couldn't move as fast as the others.

"Suddenly, halfway down the walk, Mrs. McCloskey gave a yell and grabbed at her neck. As she described it to her husband that night, her mink coat seemed to jump right off her shoulders of its own accord—it landed on the lawn, and started sliding across the grass."

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"What kind of drinks do they serve at these literary meetings?" Shirley said.

"Old Mrs. Harmon never takes anything stronger than tea—and she saw the coat go sailing through the air too, and she saw Mrs. McCloskey run after it and scoop it up from the grass. The other ladies didn't turn around soon enough to see the flying coat, so Mrs. McCloskey laughed and told them she had tripped and the coat had fallen off her back. Mrs. Martineau made a crack about people who are so rich they can afford to throw away their minks, and the incident passed off as a joke.

"But Mrs. McCloskey was terribly upset about it. 'There's something *wrong* with this coat,' she kept saying to her husband that night. 'I can feel the *presence* of something —some kind of evil spirit!' And no matter how hard he tried, Dr. McCloskey couldn't calm her down and convince her she was just imagining things."

"But the incident on the lawn was an obvious hallucination," Shirley said. "Subconsciously Mrs. McCloskey rejected and despised the materialistic side of her nature as symbolized by the mink coat. And so, with no voluntary effort or even conscious awareness, she flung it off her back onto Mrs. Martineau's lawn."

"And the old lady, Mrs. Harmon?" Mom said. "She had a hallucination too?"

"There *is* such a thing as mass hypnosis," Shirley said.

"Maybe so," I said, "but there were half a dozen more incidents in the next two weeks, all of which Mrs. McCloskey reported to her husband. She'd try to throw her coat over her chair in a restaurant, and it would keep slipping to the floor. She'd be walking along the street, and suddenly the coat would seem to be pushing against her, trying to move her in the opposite direction. One afternoon, right after she hung it up in her bedroom closet, she thought she heard it thumping against the inside of the closet door. And finally the most frightening incident of all—"

"How's the pot roast—all right?" said the waiter.

"Personally I like to use more paprika," Mom said, "but otherwise it isn't the worst I ever tasted." The waiter shrugged and moved away, and Mom turned back to me. "So? The most frightening incident of all?"

"At two o'clock in the morning," I said, "Dr. McCloskey was awakened by his wife. She was scared to death, he says, and on the verge of hysterics. 'It's getting away, it's getting away!' she kept screaming. 'It slid across the floor, it went out to the foyer!'

"Dr. McCloskey saw that the door to the bedroom closet was wide open, and the bedroom door was open too. So he got out of bed and went to the foyer—and believe it or

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not, he saw the mink coat wrapped around the handle of the front door. The foyer light was dim, and the doctor was still half asleep, but he swears that it looked for one moment as if that mink coat were trying to turn the handle of the door—as if it wanted to get out to the stairs and go down to the ground floor and leave the house!

"Well, he grabbed hold of the coat and pulled it off the door handle—and then he told himself that he was developing as big an imagination as his wife."

"Does he think it was his imagination that got the coat from the bedroom closet to the front door?" Mom said.

"He thinks it never *was* in the bedroom closet. His wife and he came in late from a party that night—she was exhausted, a little groggy, and the house was overheated. He thinks she took off her coat the moment she stepped inside and hung it on the door handle without realizing what she was doing, and then went straight to bed. As for seeing the coat slide across the room—well, he thinks she dreamed that, one of those terribly vivid dreams that seem to be real even after you wake up."

Mom gave a snort. "A woman who's dying to have a mink coat all her life—she hangs it up at night on a door handle?"

"What *other* explanation is there?" I said. "Anyway, Mrs. McCloskey couldn't get to sleep the rest of that night, even though her husband put the coat in the closet and locked the closet door. And the next day she made up her mind to find out the truth once and for all—was the coat haunted by the ghost of Mrs. Tannenbaum, or wasn't it?"

"How on earth *could* she find out such a thing?" Shirley said.

"By asking Mrs. Tannenbaum direct, how else?" Mom said. "Am I right, Davie?"

"Absolutely. Mrs. McCloskey believed in seances, as I told you. She had a favorite spiritualist—a Mrs. Vivian who lives in a small apartment on a rundown genteel street in the Village. She's a widow in her fifties—a wispy, gray-haired little woman. For the last ten years, since her husband died, she's been trying to earn a living as a medium and astrologist. The bunco squad knows all about her, but it's never been worthwhile to pull her in. She only operates in a small way—five or ten bucks per customer—and hardly makes enough to pay her monthly rent. What's more, she seems to believe in her own spiritualistic powers. When the dead speak through her mouth, she's just as impressed as any one of her clients.

"So Mrs. McCloskey took her mink coat down to Mrs. Vivian. And she didn't go by herself—she took her friend, old Mrs. Harmon of the literary club along. 'Whatever happens,' she said, 'I want to be sure it isn't only in my imagination.'

"Well, Mrs. Vivian put the mink

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on the table in front of her, turned out the lights, and went into her trance—clasping her hands, rolling her eyes, moaning and groaning. And pretty soon a voice came out of her, much deeper and more belligerent than her own natural voice. 'This is Juliet Tannenbaum talking,' it said. 'How dare you wear the coat that belongs to me! You'd better get rid of it, or I'll never give you any peace! Do what I say, or I'll drive you into an early grave!'

"That was Mrs. Tannenbaum's message—old Mrs. Harmon remembers it word for word, Mrs. McCloskey repeated it later to her husband, and Mrs. Vivian told us about it when we questioned her."

"Mrs. Vivian can hear what she says in her trances?"

"She's wide-awake at all times, Mom. The voice coming out of her, she says, seems to belong to somebody else. She has no idea what it's going to say—she listens to it just as curiously as her clients do.

"Well, after she left Mrs. Vivian's place, Mrs. McCloskey went straight to her husband's office. She told him she wanted to get rid of the coat. It broke her heart to do it, because it was so beautiful, but she was too frightened to keep it. What's more, the experience had upset her so much that she didn't even want another mink coat in its place.

"When the coat was sold, she said, he could keep the money—she had learned her lesson and she was through with expensive luxuries for good. The doctor tried to talk her out of this, but she wouldn't change her mind. Then she left him and went off to her Wednesday afternoon Philharmonic concert, where the coat appeared in public for the last time."

"And the doctor sold the coat?" Mom said.

"After his wife left, he called up Harry Schultz—that is, Madame Rosa—and asked for the name of the auction house which had auctioned off the coat in the first place. Schultz offered to buy the coat back for what the doctor had paid for it, but the doctor decided to take his chances with an auction. He called the auction house and arranged for them to pick up the coat the next day. But they never did."

Mom leaned forward, holding her fork in the air, completely forgetting to plunge it into her baked potato. The fact is, she smelled blood. Nobody on earth has a kinder heart than Mom—when I was a kid, she could never bring herself to spank me; but she *does* enjoy a good murder story.

"The doctor and his wife stayed home that night and watched television," I said. "But around eleven he got an emergency call from a patient in Brooklyn. So he got in his car and drove away, leaving his wife alone in the house."

"The maid don't sleep in?" Mom said.

"Berenice Webley? She comes in early every morning to make break-

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fast—she's got her own key—and leaves every night after dinner. Well, when the doctor got to Brooklyn he found it wasn't his patient who had called him—it was some kind of practical joke. He was mad as a wet hen, and he drove home again. He was gone nearly two hours. When he got back to his front door, he found it unlocked. This worried him, because he had distinctly heard his wife snap the bolt behind him.

"The doctor stepped inside and called out to her. No answer. He went upstairs and found her in the bedroom, sprawled on the bed. Her dress was torn, and the bedspread was rumpled. She was dead—she had died thirty to sixty minutes earlier. At first Dr. McCloskey thought she might've had a heart attack, but later the autopsy showed she had been smothered to death. Some large thick soft object had been held tightly over her face—or maybe I should say that it held *itself* over her face."

"Meaning?" Mom pushed her chin forward.

"Small bits of fur were found on her lips and in her nostrils. Mink fur, Mom. As for the mink coat—well, its box, with Madame Rosa's label on it, was lying empty on the floor, as if Mrs. McCloskey had been in the act of packing it up. But the mink coat itself was gone."

I stopped talking. Let's face it, I was kind of pleased with the effect I had made.

Finally Shirley spoke up. "For heaven's sake, David, does the New York Homicide Squad—grown men, living in the Twentieth Century!—actually believe that this woman was smothered by a haunted coat?"

"Officially," I said, "the New York Homicide Squad only believes in flesh-and-blood killers. That's what we're looking for in this case. But so far we can't find anybody, outside of that ghost, who has a motive. Mrs. McCloskey was a harmless little woman without an enemy in the world. Her marriage was happy, and her husband hasn't been playing around on the side—and don't think we haven't dug into his private life! All their financial assets, including the house, are in his name—he doesn't inherit a thing by her death, not even any insurance. They've got one son—he's married, practices medicine in Michigan, and hasn't quarreled with his parents. Anyway, he was home in bed on the night of the murder."

"And how about robbery?" Mom said. "A valuable item *is* missing, no?"

"It had to be a very peculiar robber who took that coat. Mrs. McCloskey had a box full of jewelry on top of her dresser—and not one piece was missing. On the bed table was the doctor's billfold, with almost two hundred dollars in small bills inside of it, and the contents were intact."

"Two hundred dollars! What was he doing with so much cash?"

"His hobby is collecting books—

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first editions and so on. Well, the afternoon of the murder he sold a few of his books to a dealer. He got paid in cash, and he had to take the money home with him because the banks were already closed.

"But there's another reason why it probably wasn't a robber who killed her. As soon as the doctor left the house at eleven that night, his wife bolted the front door. He swears he heard her do it—she always *did* do it when she had to be alone in the house at night. But when he got home nearly two hours later, the door was unlocked and unbolted—and no sign that it had been forced, no sign that any of the windows had been forced.

"So it must have been Mrs. McCloskey herself who opened the door to the killer. But she was a nervous woman. She never would've let in a stranger—only somebody she knew."

"Didn't you say her maid had an extra key to the house?" Shirley said.

"The maid, Berenice Webley, has an airtight alibi. She was at a dance up at 125th Street—in full view of a hundred people until after two o'clock in the morning. Besides, her key couldn't have been any use for opening the bolt. So there you are. The killer wasn't a robber, and nobody who knew the woman has the slightest motive. Who's left? Only Mrs. Tannenbaum's ghost."

"Excuse me," Mom said, "but the ghost didn't have a motive either. The ghost told Mrs. McCloskey she should get rid of that mink coat or else she'd end up in an early grave. So Mrs. McCloskey *listened* to the warning, didn't she? She *was* getting rid of the coat. So why did the ghost have to kill her?"

I suddenly felt very tired. For three days the boys down at Homicide—the ones who *weren't* working on this case—had been making jokes about ghosts. The subject of ghosts was beginning to lose its charm for me.

"I don't know, Mom," I said. "Is there a rule that a ghost has to have a sense of fairplay? Maybe this ghost *enjoys* killing people. Or maybe it didn't believe that Mrs. McCloskey really wanted to get rid of the coat. Or maybe—"

But Mom was frowning—that dark frown which shows she's got an idea percolating. "The ghost didn't believe—she didn't really want—" Mom began to nod her head, and then she looked up at me, and there was a big smile on her face. "It's possible, Davie! It's a definite possibility! Thank you kindly for the suggestion!"

"What suggestion, Mom? If you're on to something—"

"On to something? How could this be? A little *nebbish* like me, who don't even know what kind of a coat she wears? But maybe I *could* be on to something—if I heard the answers to three or four questions."

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I shot a warning glance at Shirley, then I said, "I'll tell you whatever I can, Mom."

"First call the waiter and order me some of the apple strudel."

I motioned to the waiter, we ordered our desserts, and then Mom raised her finger. "Question Number One. Was Dr. McCloskey selling a lot of his books lately?"

"As a matter of fact, he was—a dozen or more in the last three weeks. Also he was economizing on cigars and steam baths and so on. He figured he had to, if he ever expected to pay off the money the bank had loaned him to buy that mink coat."

Mom gave one of her nods—carefully not letting me know if she was happy with the answer or not. "Question Number Two. The old lady Mrs. Harmon—the one that went to the seance with the doctor's wife—just exactly how near-sighted is she?"

"I'm sorry, Mom, but that's a bad guess. She isn't near-sighted at all. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Harmon is terribly far-sighted. She has to wear glasses for reading, but not for walking along the street."

"She isn't near-sighted? You're positive of this? All right—so, Question Number Three. This woman with the seances, this Mrs. Vivian, has she maybe been a little richer lately than she usually is?"

No doubt of it, this question pulled me up short. "I don't know how you knew that, Mom, but she *has* been. We keep a routine check on people connected with murder cases, and the other day our man reported that Mrs. Vivian went to Macy's and paid a lot of money—in cash—for a new living-room sofa. We asked her where she got the money—since she's usually so strapped—and she told us she'd been saving it for years in a box in her closet. Well, we can't *prove* she's lying—but our guess is she's latched on to some gullible female who has more to spend than most of her other clients."

Mom nodded. "So—Question Number Four. The doctor's wife—was she the type person who had trouble remembering people's names?"

"Mom, what kind of question—"

"Am I asking, or am I answering?"

"Okay, okay. Well, actually Mrs. McCloskey *was* that type—vague and forgetful, that is. Her husband told us how she embarrassed him sometimes by calling their oldest friends by the wrong names. He didn't say it about her reproachfully, though—it seemed to be one of the reasons why he loved her."

"Exactly," Mom said. "He loved her, and she loved him.. That's the whole point about this case. That's the explanation for the ghost. Good—here's our strudel."

And Mom wouldn't say another word about the murder until she had tasted the strudel, frowned a little, then announced that it needed more cinnamon.

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"You were saying, Mom? The explanation for the ghost?"

Mom gave a little smile. "Did I ever tell you about your Aunt Doris that everybody said was the dumbest woman in the United States of America?"

"I never knew I *had* an Aunt Doris."

"She's dead now, poor thing. She married your Papa's oldest brother, Saul. They moved out to Hollywood, California, and he got to be a big shot in the movie business. Such a brilliant man. He read books—long heavy ones, by Russian writers. And he listened to symphony music—he didn't just go to the concerts and fall asleep, he actually listened. Everybody said what a shame it was he married a dope like poor Doris—a girl that used to be a salesgirl in Marshall Field's in Chicago, that never finished high school, that couldn't read a serious book if her life depended on it, and every time she opened her mouth she used the wrong word or she mispronounced the right one.

"And the worst thing about her, everybody said, she couldn't get anywhere on time. For theater dates, for dinner at people's houses, Saul and Doris were always showing up late. And she was always apologizing because she forgot what time they were expected, or because she realized at the last minute that she was wearing the wrong dress, so she had to run back and change it. Poor Saul, everybody said—what an embarrassment for him to have such a dumb wife! And then—"

"Mother," Shirley broke in, "does this *really* have anything to do with that mink—"

"And then," Mom said, not even giving Shirley a glance, "your Aunt Doris died. All of a sudden she got sick, and a month later she was dead. Only fifty-one years old—such a tragedy! Saul was so upset, for a long time he wouldn't go out of the house. But finally he started accepting invitations again—dinner parties, theater dates, and so on. And what a surprise everybody got! Everywhere he went, Saul got there late. Dinners got just as cold waiting for him as if Doris was still alive.

"So pretty soon the truth dawned on people. It was *Saul* who was inconsiderate and never showed up on time for his appointments. All these years it hadn't been Doris' fault at all. She used to pretend *she* was the guilty one, she used to let people blame this bad habit on *her* stupidity—because she loved her husband, she wanted to protect him and keep people from thinking bad things about him."

"But Mom, I don't see the point—"

"The point is, even a stupid person can love somebody and think up schemes to help him. Even a silly vain woman can care more about her husband than she cares about a mink coat. Smart people don't have a monopoly on making sacrifices. Waiter, I'll have some more

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coffee, please—and this time you'll make it hot?"

The coffee came, Mom sipped it and said it was hot enough, then she went on, "So now it's obvious, isn't it? Mrs. McCloskey, the doctor's wife, had trouble remembering people's names—even people she knew for years. Naturally she'd have trouble remembering the name of the woman that used to own her mink coat. Mrs. Janet Tannenbaum was the woman's name—but in Mrs. McCloskey's mind it could just as easy turn itself into Mrs. *Juliet* Tannenbaum."

"That seance!" I said. "When the ghost spoke through Mrs. Vivian's mouth—"

"The ghost's first words," Mom said, "if I'm remembering correctly, were 'This is Juliet Tannenbaum talking.' All right, even if you believe in ghosts you might have trouble believing in one that forgets her own first name! Somebody *told* Mrs. Vivian to speak in the ghost's voice, somebody wrote out those words for her to say—and paid her a nice bonus for putting on her act, enough so she could suddenly afford a new sofa at Macy's. And the somebody who did it was so vague and forgetful that she gave that ghost the wrong first name!"

"But Mother," Shirley said, "that doesn't necessarily mean it was Mrs. McCloskey—"

"All right, if you want it, there's another piece of evidence that Mrs. McCloskey didn't really believe in the ghost. What did she do as soon as Mrs. Vivian's seance was over? She went to her husband's office, told him to sell the coat, then went off to her afternoon concert—where she wore the coat in public for the last time. So I'm asking you—if she really believed this coat had a ghost in it, if she really believed that threat which Mrs. Tannenbaum made, why didn't she take off the coat as soon as she could? Why wasn't she scared of wearing it another minute? How could she bring it to the concert and show it off to her friends without a worry in the world? Only one answer—this was a woman who knew that there wasn't any ghost."

"But if she staged that seance," I said, "she must've staged all those other things the ghost did. And I'll be—I mean, I don't see how she could have managed it!"

"It was simple. What *did* the ghost do, when you come right down to it? Most of the incidents—like the ghost pushing against her on the street, thumping at the closet door, falling off chairs in restaurants—happened without any witnesses. And when the coat jumped off her back onto Mrs. Martineau's lawn—isn't it obvious that she *threw* it off her back? She didn't do it subconsciously, like Shirley said, she did it on purpose. She waited till nobody could see her do it except old Mrs. Harmon—who's very farsighted. Meaning that Mrs. Harmon could see the coat very clear

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while it was sailing through the air *far away* from her eyes, but she couldn't see anything except a blur while the coat was on Mrs. McCloskey's shoulders, *close* to her eyes. She couldn't see Mrs. McCloskey pulling off the coat and throwing it, but she *could* see it landing on the grass —so naturally she thought it got there by itself."

"And the night Mrs. McCloskey woke up her husband," I said, "and told him the coat had escaped from the closet and slid out to the front door—you mean she took it from the closet and wrapped it around that doorknob *before* she woke him up!"

"You still haven't explained the very first incident," Shirley said, "when the maid couldn't get the coat off its hanger—"

"That was probably a genuine accident," Mom said. "So a sleeve of the coat got caught on the hanger, just like Dr. McCloskey thought. And Mrs. McCloskey made a remark about Mrs. Tannenbaum's ghost. But later on, when she remembered this incident, it gave her the idea for everything else. It was her inspiration for the rest of the scheme."

"But *why*, Mom? What was her motive?"

"It's your Aunt Doris all over again, Davie. If a woman loves a man, she'll do anything she can to help him—even if it makes *her* look stupid. For years Mrs. McCloskey wanted a mink coat, and finally her husband bought her one, and she was happy with it at first. But pretty soon she began to notice certain things—he was selling his rare books that he loved, he was cutting down on cigars, he was staying away from the steam bath. And maybe, out of curiosity, she accidentally looked through his papers and found out about his loan from the bank.

"And suddenly it came to her: 'These are the sacrifices he made to get me that mink coat!' Right away she hates the sight of that coat. She don't stop thinking it's beautiful—because she's a woman who's only human. But she's ashamed of herself for thinking so—because she's a woman who puts her husband first. All she wants to do now is get rid of the coat and give him back his money."

"But why such an absurd involved way of doing it?" Shirley said.

"How else could she do it? Could she tell him her real reason for getting rid of the coat? Maybe she's a stupid woman, but she knows what a blow this would be to his pride. Like a failure he'd feel, a no-good who couldn't afford to give his wife the things she wanted. So to save his pride she has to convince him she *don't* want that coat any more.

"If she says to him, 'I don't like the looks of it now!' he wouldn't believe her. But if she tells him she's got one of her crazy superstitions

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about it, if she invents a lot of incidents to account for this superstition, he *will* believe her. There isn't any silly notion he wouldn't think she was capable of—and she knows it.

" 'All right,' she decides, 'I'll make him believe I'm too scared to keep the coat. He'll think I'm acting like an idiot—but after all, he thinks that already. The important thing is, he'll get his books and his money back, and his pride will be saved!' "

Mom stopped, and gave a little sigh. "So that's what was haunting the coat—her love for her husband and her shame over spending his money."

"But Mom, the woman *was* murdered! The coat *has* disappeared!"

"Who's the murderer, is that what you're asking? Believe me, that's the easy part. That I knew right from the start. If you ever had to shop for a family, you'd know it also."

"Shop for a family!"

"You men at the Homicide Squad," Mom said, "you should all be forced to do your family shopping for a few weeks. It's because men don't have experience with such things that they're always such big suckers. Anything the salesgirl tells them they'll believe."

"What salesgirl? I don't see—"

"It's an old rule for shoppers, but it's still a good one—watch your step with a bargain. In this world nobody gives you something for nothing. If a two-dollar bag of oranges is selling for one dollar, you can automatically assume there are some rotten oranges in the bag. And if a fifteen thousand dollar mink coat is selling for five thousand dollars—"

"You think that coat was a fake, Mom? But the auction house valued Mrs. Tannenbaum's mink at—"

"Who says that Mrs. Tannenbaum's mink was the one Dr. McCloskey got? Who says Madame Rosa or Mr. Schultz or whatever his name is didn't slip a different mink out from his sleeve—or maybe I should say a rabbit? This is a crime, if I'm not mistaken—he could go to jail for it, no?"

"He sure could!"

"So it isn't hard to imagine Mister Rosa's feelings when the doctor called him up and told him he was going to have the coat auctioned off. Nothing gets auctioned at those prices unless it's appraised first. Mr. Rosa *had* to get that coat back before any appraiser could look at it. So he sent the doctor out to Brooklyn on a wild-goose chase, thinking that Mrs. McCloskey would be easier to convince alone. He showed up at the house and rang the bell. She let him in, and he tried to talk her into selling the coat back to him then and there. She wouldn't do it—he was a little too eager maybe—so they got into an argument and he lost his head and he smothered her with the first thing

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that came to his hand. It happened to be the mink coat."

"If we could prove that, Mom—"

"There was a box on the floor near her body, didn't you say so? A long box with a Madame Rosa label on it. You assumed this was the box that the coat originally came in, that Mrs. McCloskey was about to put the coat back in it for the auction house. But why should she hold onto that box for two months? She intended to keep the coat at the beginning, so naturally she threw its box away.

"The box you found near her body, Davie, was brought there by Mr. Rosa on the night of the murder, because he expected to carry the coat away in it. But after he killed Mrs. McCloskey he maybe panicked and ran away and forgot all about his box. Look it over—maybe it's got his fingerprints on it. Maybe somebody in his shop saw him leaving with it. I'm positive it'll be your proof."

I got to my feet. "I'll have Schultz picked up right now. Then we can start turning his place inside out."

So I left the table and phoned Homicide from the booth in the restaurant lobby. When I got back to the table I was just in time to hear Mom sighing. "It's like I mentioned earlier—mink is overrated. I've been wearing it for years, and believe me—"

And once again Shirley couldn't keep her mouth shut. "When did you ever wear mink, Mother? Just tell me one occasion!"

Mom met Shirley's gaze, and her voice couldn't have been softer. "All my life I've been wearing it. I shut my eyes and run my hands over my shoulders and what do I feel? Mink—thick and soft, all the way down to my knees—the highest quality—"

"Oh, I see!" Shirley cried. "This mink is in your *imagination!*"

Mom spread her hands. "And why not? Isn't that the most beautiful kind?" For a moment there was a sad look on her face. But then the waiter came with the check. Mom took one look at it and let out a yelp. "From now on, stove or no stove, we're eating up in the Bronx!"

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a **MISS MARPLE** *story by*

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Miss Marple solves the Sixteenth Century mystery of a galleon from the Spanish Armada wrecked off the coast of Cornwall—sunk with all its treasure on the dreaded Serpent Rocks . . . a romantic detective story of forebodings and premonitions of evil—but leave it to Miss Marple and her uncanny knowledge of "little village things" . . .

MISS MARPLE AND THE GOLDEN GALLEON

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"I DO NOT KNOW THAT THE STORY that I am going to tell you is a fair one," said Raymond West, "because I can't give you the solution of it. Yet the facts were so interesting and so curious that I should like to propound it to you as a problem, and perhaps between us we may arrive at some logical conclusion.

"The date of these happenings was two years ago, when I went down to spend Whitsuntide with a man named John Newman, in Cornwall."

"Cornwall?" said Joyce Lemprière sharply.

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing. Only it's odd. My story is about a place in Cornwall, too—a little fishing village called Rathole. Don't tell me yours is the same?"

"No. My village is called Polperran. It is situated on the west coast of Cornwall; a very wild and rocky spot. I had been introduced a few weeks previously and had found him a most interesting companion. A man of intelligence and independent means, he was possessed of a romantic imagination.

"As a result of his latest hobby he had taken the lease of Pol House. He was an authority on Elizabethan times, and he described to me in vivid and graphic language the rout of the Spanish Armada. So enthusiastic was he that one could almost imagine that he had been an eyewitness at the scene. Is there anything in reincarnation? I wonder."

"You are so romantic, Raymond dear," said Miss Marple, looking benignly at him.

"Romantic is the last thing I am,"

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said Raymond West, slightly annoyed. "But this fellow Newman was chock-full of it, and he interested me for that reason as a curious survival of the past. It appears that a certain galleon belonging to the Armada, and known to contain a vast amount of treasure in the form of gold from the Spanish Main, was wrecked off the coast of Cornwall on the famous and treacherous Serpent Rocks. For some years, so Newman told me, attempts had been made to salvage the ship and recover the treasure. I believe such stories are not uncommon, though the number of mythical treasure ships is largely in excess of the genuine ones.

"A company had been formed, but had gone bankrupt, and Newman had been able to buy the rights of the thing—or whatever you call it—for a mere song. He waxed very enthusiastic about it all. According to him it was merely a question of the latest scientific, up-to-date machinery. The gold was there, and he had no doubt whatever that it could be recovered.

"It occurred to me as I listened to him how often things happen that way. A rich man such as Newman succeeds almost without effort, and yet in all probability the actual value in money of his find would mean little to him. I must say that his ardor infected me. I saw galleons drifting up the coast, flying before the storm, beaten and broken on the black rocks.

"The mere word galleon has a romantic sound. The phrase 'Spanish Gold' thrills the schoolboy—and the grown-up man also. Moreover, I was working at the time on a novel, some scenes of which were laid in the Sixteenth Century, and I saw the prospect of getting valuable local color from my host.

"I set off that Friday morning from Paddington in high spirits, and looking forward to my trip. The carriage was empty except for one man, who sat facing me in the opposite corner. He was a tall, soldierly-looking man, and I could not rid myself of the impression that somewhere or other I had seen him before.

"I cudgeled my brains for some time in vain; but at last I had it. My traveling companion was Inspector Badgworth, and I had to run across him when I was doing a series of articles on the Everson disappearance case.

"I recalled myself to him, and we were soon chatting pleasantly enough. When I told him I was going to Polperran he remarked that that was a rum coincidence, because he himself was also bound for that place. I did not like to seem inquisitive, so was careful not to ask him what took him there. Instead, I spoke of my own interest in the place, and mentioned the wrecked Spanish galleon.

"To my surprise the Inspector seemed to know all about it. 'That will be the *Juan Fernandez*,'

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he said. 'Your friend won't be the first who has sunk money trying to get money out of her. It is a romantic notion.'

"'And probably the whole story is a myth,' I said. 'No ship was ever wrecked there at all.'

"'Oh, the ship was sunk there right enough,' said the Inspector—'along with a good company of others. You would be surprised if you knew how many wrecks there are on that part of the coast. As a matter of fact, that is what takes me down there now. That is where the *Otranto* was wrecked six months ago.'

"'I remember reading about it,' I said. 'No lives were lost, I think?'

"'No lives were lost,' said the Inspector; 'but something else was lost. It is not generally known, but the *Otranto* was carrying bullion.'

"'Yes?' I said, much interested.

"'Naturally we have had divers at work on salvage operations, but—*the gold has gone, Mr. West.*'

"'Gone!' I said, staring at him. 'How can it have gone?'

"'That is the question,' said the Inspector. 'The rocks tore a gaping hole in her strongroom. It was easy enough for the divers to get in that way, but they found the strongroom empty. The question is, was the gold stolen before the wreck or afterwards? Was it ever in the strongroom at all?'

"'It seems a curious case,' I said.

"'It is a very curious case, when you consider what bullion is. Not a diamond necklace that you could put into your pocket. When you think how cumbersome it is and how bulky—well, the whole thing seems absolutely impossible. There may have been some hocus-pocus before the ship sailed; but if not, it must have been removed within the last six months—and I am going down to look into the matter.'

"I found Newman waiting to meet me at the station. He apologized for the absence of his car, which had gone to Truro for some necessary repairs. Instead, he met me with a farm truck belonging to the property.

"I swung myself up beside him, and we wound carefully in and out of the narrow streets of the fishing village. We went up a steep ascent, ran a little distance along a winding lane, and turned in at the granite-pillared gates of Pol House.

"The place was a charming one; it was situated high up the cliffs, with a good view out to sea. Part of it was some three or four hundred years old, and a modern wing had been added. Behind it farming land of about seven or eight acres ran inland.

"'Welcome to Pol House,' said Newman. 'And to The Sign of the Golden Galleon.' And he pointed to where, over the front door, hung a reproduction of a Spanish galleon with all sails set.

"My first evening was a most instructive one. My host showed me

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the old manuscripts relating to the *Juan Fernandez*. He unrolled charts for me and indicated positions on them with dotted lines, and he produced plans of diving apparatus, which, I may say, mystified me utterly and completely.

"I told him of my meeting with Inspector Badgworth, in which he was much interested.

" 'They are a queer people round this coast,' he said reflectively. 'Smuggling and wrecking is in their blood. When a ship goes down on their coast they cannot help regarding it as lawful plunder meant for their pockets. There is a fellow here I should like you to see. He is an interesting survival.'

"The next day dawned bright and clear. I was taken down into Polperran and there introduced to Newman's diver, a man called Higgins. He was a wooden-faced individual, extremely taciturn, and his contributions to the conversation were mostly monosyllables. After a discussion between them on highly technical matters, we adjourned to The Three Anchors. A tankard of beer somewhat loosened the worthy fellow's tongue.

" 'Detective gentleman from London has come down,' he grunted. 'They do say that ship that went down here last November was carrying a mortal lot of gold. Well, she wasn't the first to go down, and she won't be the last.'

" 'Hear, hear,' chimed in the landlord of The Three Anchors. 'That is a true word you say there, Bill Higgins.'

" 'I reckon it is, Mr. Kelvin,' said Higgins.

"I looked with some curiosity at the landlord. He was a remarkable man, dark and swarthy, with curiously broad shoulders. His eyes were bloodshot, and he had a curiously furtive way of avoiding one's glance. I suspected that this was the man of whom Newman had spoken, saying he was an interesting survival.

" 'We don't want interfering foreigners on this coast,' he said somewhat truculently.

" 'Meaning the police?' asked Newman, smiling.

" 'Meaning the police—*and others,*' said Kelvin significantly. 'And don't you forget it, mister.'

" 'Do you know, Newman, that sounded to me very like a threat,' I said as we climbed the hill homewards.

"My friend laughed.

" 'Nonsense; I don't do the folk down here any harm.'

"I shook my head doubtfully. There was something sinister and uncivilized about Kelvin. I felt that his mind might run in strange, unrecognized channels.

"I think I date the beginning of my uneasiness from that moment. I had slept well enough that first night, but the next night my sleep was troubled and broken. Sunday dawned, dark and sullen, with an overcast sky and the threatenings of

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thunder in the air. I am always a bad hand at hiding my feelings, and Newman noticed the change in me.

"'What is the matter with you, West? You are a bundle of nerves this morning.'

"'I don't know,' I confessed, 'but I have got a horrible feeling of foreboding.'

"'It's the weather.'

"'Yes, perhaps.'

"I said no more. In the afternoon we went out in Newman's motorboat, but the rain came on with such vigor that we were glad to return to shore and change into dry clothing.

"And that evening my uneasiness increased. Outside, the storm howled and roared. Towards ten o'clock the tempest calmed down. Newman looked out the window.

"'It is clearing,' he said. 'I shouldn't wonder if it was a perfectly fine night in another half hour. If so, I shall go out for a stroll.'

"I yawned. 'I am frightfully sleepy,' I said. 'I didn't get much sleep last night. I think that tonight I shall turn in early.'

"This I did. On the previous night I had slept little. Tonight I slept heavily. Yet my slumbers were not restful. I was still oppressed with an awful foreboding of evil; I had terrible dreams. I dreamed of dreadful abysses and vast chasms, among which I was wandering, knowing that a slip of the foot meant death.

"I wakened to find the hands of my clock pointing to eight o'clock. My head was aching badly, and the terror of my night's dreams was still upon me.

"So strongly was this so that when I went to the window and drew it up, I started back with a fresh feeling of terror—for the first thing I saw, or thought I saw, was a man digging an open grave.

"It took me a minute or two to pull myself together; then I realized that the grave digger was Newman's gardener, and the 'grave' was destined to accommodate three new rose trees which were lying on the turf waiting for the moment they should be securely planted in the earth.

"The gardener looked up and saw me and touched his hat.

"'Good morning, sir. Nice morning, sir.'

"'I suppose it is,' I said doubtfully, still unable to shake off completely the depression of my spirits.

"However, as the gardener had said, it was certainly a nice morning. The sun was shining and the sky a clear pale blue that promised fine weather for the day. I went down to breakfast whistling a tune.

"Newman had no maids living in the house. Two middle-aged sisters, who lived in a farmhouse near by, came daily to attend to his simple wants. One of them was placing the coffee pot on the table as I entered the room.

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"'Good morning, Elizabeth,' I said. 'Mr. Newman not down yet?'

"'He must have been out very early, sir,' she replied. 'He wasn't in the house when we arrived.'

"Instantly my uneasiness returned. On the two previous mornings Newman had come down to breakfast somewhat late; and I didn't fancy that at any time he was an early riser.

"Moved by those forebodings, I ran up to his bedroom. It was empty, and, moreover, his bed had *not* been slept in. A brief examination of his room showed me two other things. If Newman had gone out for a stroll he must have gone out in his evening clothes, for they were missing.

"I was sure now that my premonition of evil was justified. Newman had gone, as he had said he would do, for an evening stroll. For some reason or other he had not returned. Why? Had he met with an accident? Fallen over the cliffs? A search must be made at once.

"In a few hours I had collected a large band of helpers, and together we hunted in every direction along the cliffs and on the rocks below. But there was no sign of Newman.

"In the end, in despair, I sought out Inspector Badgworth. His face grew very grave.

"'It looks to me as if there had been foul play,' he said. 'There are some not overscrupulous customers in these parts. Have you seen Kelvin, the landlord of The Three Anchors?'

"I said that I had seen him.

"'Did you know he did a turn in jail four years ago? Assault and battery.'

"'It doesn't surprise me,' I said.

"'The general opinion in this place seems to be that your friend is a bit too fond of nosing his way into things that do not concern him. I hope he has come to no serious harm.'

"The search was continued with redoubled vigor. It was not until late that afternoon that our efforts were rewarded. We discovered Newman in a deep ditch in a corner of his own property. His hands and feet were securely fastened with rope, and a handkerchief had been thrust into his mouth and secured there so as to prevent him crying out.

"He was terribly exhausted and in great pain; but after some frictioning of his wrists and ankles, and a long draft from a whiskey flask, he was able to give his account of what had occurred.

"The weather having cleared, he had gone out for a stroll about eleven o'clock. His way had taken him some distance along the cliffs to a spot commonly known as Smugglers' Cove, owing to the large number of caves to be found there. Here he had noticed some men loading something from a small boat, and had strolled down to see what was going on. Whatever the

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stuff was it seemed to be a great weight, and it was being carried into one of the farthermost caves.

"With no real suspicion of anything being amiss, nevertheless Newman had wondered. He had drawn quite near them without being observed. Suddenly there was a cry of alarm, and immediately two powerful seafaring men had set upon him and rendered him unconscious.

"When next he came to himself, he found himself lying on a motor vehicle of some kind, which was proceeding, with many bumps and bangs, as far as he could guess, up the lane which led from the coast to the village. To his great surprise the vehicle turned in at the gate of his own house. There, after a whispered conversation between the men, they at length flung him into a ditch at a spot where the depth of it rendered discovery unlikely for some time.

"Then the vehicle drove on, and, he thought, passed out through another gate some quarter of a mile nearer the village. He could give no description of his assailants except that they were certainly seafaring men, and, by their speech, Cornishmen.

"Inspector Badgworth was very interested.

" 'Depend on it that is where the stuff has been hidden,' he cried. 'Somehow or other it has been salvaged from the wreck and has been stored in some lonely cave. It is known that we have searched all the caves in Smugglers' Cove, and that we are now going farther afield, and they have evidently been moving the stuff at night to a cave that has been already searched and is not likely to be searched again. Unfortunately they have had at least eighteen hours to dispose of the stuff. If they got Mr. Newman last night I doubt if we will find any of it there by now.'

"The Inspector hurried off to make a search. He found definite evidence that the bullion had been stored as supposed, but the gold had been once more removed, and there was no clue as to its new hiding place.

"One clue there was, however, and the Inspector himself pointed it out to me the following morning.

" 'That lane is very little used by motor vehicles,' he said, 'and in one or two places we get the traces of the tires very clearly. There is a three-cornered piece out of one tire, leaving a mark which is quite unmistakable. It shows going into the gate; here and there is a faint mark of it going out of the other gate, so there is not much doubt that it is the right vehicle we are after. Now, why did they take it out through the farther gate? It seems quite clear to me that the vehicle—a truck—came from the village. Now, there aren't many people who own a truck in the village—not more than two or three at most. Kelvin, the landlord of The Three Anchors, has one.'

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"'What was Kelvin's original profession?' asked Newman.

"'It is curious that you should ask me that, Mr. Newman. In his younger days Kelvin was a professional diver.'

"Newman and I looked at each other. The puzzle seemed to be fitting itself together piece by piece.

"'You didn't recognize Kelvin as one of the men on the beach?' asked the Inspector.

"Newman shook his head. 'I am afraid I can't say anything as to that,' he said regretfully. 'I really hadn't time to see anything.'

"The Inspector very kindly allowed me to accompany him to The Three Anchors. The garage was up a side street. The big doors were closed, but by going up a little alley at the side we found a small door that led into it, and that door was open.

"A very brief examination of the tires sufficed for the Inspector. 'We have got him, by Jove!' he exclaimed. 'Here is the mark as large as life on the rear left wheel. Now, Mr. Kelvin, I don't think you will be clever enough to wriggle out of this.'"

Raymond West came to a halt.

"Well?" said Joyce. "So far I don't see anything to make a problem about—unless they never found the gold."

"They never found the gold," said Raymond, "and they never got Kelvin either. I expect he was too clever for them, but I don't quite see how he worked it. He was duly arrested—on the evidence of the tire mark. But an extraordinary hitch arose. Just opposite the big doors of the garage was a cottage rented for the summer by a lady artist."

"Oh, these lady artists!" said Joyce, laughing.

"As you say, 'Oh, these lady artists!' This particular one had been ill for some weeks, and, in consequence, had two hospital nurses attending her. The nurse who was on night duty had pulled her armchair up to the window, where the blind was up. She declared that the truck could not have left the garage opposite without her seeing it, and she swore that in actual fact it never left the garage that night."

"I don't think that is much of a problem," said Joyce. "The nurse went to sleep, of course. They always do."

"That has—er—been known to happen," said Mr. Petherick, judiciously; "but it seems to me that we are accepting facts without sufficient examination. Before accepting the testimony of the hospital nurse, we should inquire very closely into her *bona fides*. The alibi coming with such suspicious promptness is inclined to raise doubts in one's mind."

"There is also the lady artist's testimony," said Raymond. "She declared that she was in pain, and awake most of the night, and that she would certainly have heard the truck, it being an unusual noise, and

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the night being very quiet after the storm."

"H'm," said the clergyman, "that is certainly an additional fact. Had Kelvin himself any alibi?"

"He declared that he was at home and in bed from ten o'clock onwards, but he could produce no witnesses in support of that statement."

"The nurse went to sleep," said Joyce, "and so did the patient. Ill people always think they have never slept a wink all night."

Raymond West looked inquiringly at Dr. Pender.

"Do you know, I feel sorry for that man Kelvin. It seems to me very much a case of 'Give a dog a bad name.' Kelvin had been in prison. Apart from the tire mark, which certainly seems too remarkable to be coincidence, there doesn't seem to be much against him except his unfortunate record."

"You, Sir Henry?"

Sir Henry shook his head. "As it happens," he said smiling, "I know something about this case. So, clearly, I mustn't speak."

"Well, go on, Aunt Jane; haven't you got anything to say?"

"In a minute, dear," said Miss Marple. "I am afraid I have counted wrong. Two purl, three plain, slip one, two purl—yes, that's right. What did you say, dear?"

"What is your opinion?"

"You wouldn't like my opinion, dear. Young people never do, I notice. It is better to say nothing."

"Nonsense, Aunt Jane; out with it."

"Well, dear Raymond," said Miss Marple, laying down her knitting and looking across at her nephew. "I do think you should be more careful how you choose your friends. You are so credulous, dear, so easily gulled. I suppose it is being a writer and having so much imagination. All that story about a Spanish galleon! If you were older and had more experience of life you would have been on your guard at once. A man you had known only a few weeks, too!"

Sir Henry suddenly gave vent to a great roar of laughter and slapped his knee.

"Got you this time, Raymond," he said. "Miss Marple you are wonderful. Your friend Newman, my boy, has another name—several other names in fact. At the present moment he is not in Cornwall but in Devonshire—Dartmoor, to be exact—a convict in Princetown prison. We didn't catch him over the stolen bullion business, but over the rifling of the strongroom of one of the London banks. Then we looked up his past record and we found a good portion of the gold stolen buried in the garden at Pol House.

"It was rather a neat idea. All along that Cornish coast there are stories of wrecked galleons full of gold. It accounted for the diver, and it would account later for the gold. But a scapegoat was needed, and Kelvin was ideal for the purpose.

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Newman played his little comedy very well, and our friend Raymond, with his celebrity as a writer, made an unimpeachable witness."

"But the tire mark?" objected Joyce.

"Oh, I saw that at once, dear, although I know nothing about motors," said Miss Marple. "People change a wheel, you know—I have often seen them doing it—and, of course they could take a wheel off Kelvin's truck and take it out through the small door into the alley and put it on Mr. Newman's truck and take the truck out of one gate down to the beach, fill it up with the gold, bring it up through the other gate, and then they must have taken the wheel back and put it back on Mr. Kelvin's truck while, I suppose, someone else was tying up Mr. Newman in a ditch. Very uncomfortable for him and probably longer before he was found than he expected. I suppose the man who called himself the gardener attended to that side of the business."

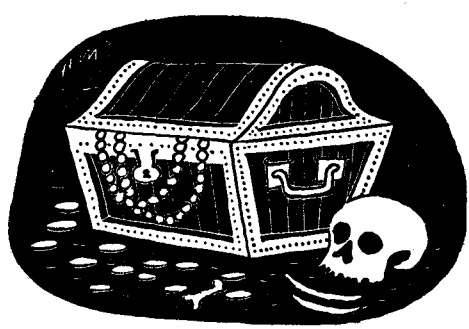
"Why do you say, 'called himself the gardener,' Aunt Jane?" asked Raymond curiously.

"Well, he can't have been a real gardener, can he?" said Miss Marple. "Gardeners don't work on Whit Monday. Everybody knows that."

She smiled and folded up her knitting.

"It was really that little fact that put me on the right scent," she said. She looked across at Raymond.

"When you are a householder, dear, and have a garden of your own, you will know these little things."



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A whiz of a story, packed with plot—and with surprises . . . chuckle with the talented author of THE FUGITIVE PIGEON *and* THE BUSY BODY . . .

THE SWEETEST MAN IN THE WORLD

by DONALD E. WESTLAKE

I ADJUSTED MY HAIR IN THE HALL mirror before opening the door. My hair was gray, and piled neatly on top of my head. I smoothed my skirt, took a deep breath, and opened the door.

The man in the hallway was thirtyish, well-dressed, quietly handsome, and carrying a brief case. He was also somewhat taken aback to see me. He glanced again at the apartment number on the door, looked back at me, and said, "Excuse me, I'm looking for Miss Diane Wilson."

"Yes, of course," I said. "Do come in."

He gazed past me uncertainly, hesitating on the doorstep, saying, "Is she in?"

"I'm Diane Wilson," I said.

He blinked. "*You're* Diane Wilson?"

"Yes, I am."

"The Diane Wilson who worked for Mr. Edward Cunningham?"

"Yes, indeed." I made a sad face. "Such a tragic thing," I said. "He was the sweetest man in the world, Mr. Cunningham was."

He cleared his throat, and I could see him struggling to regain his composure. "I see," he said. "Well, uh—well, Miss Wilson, my name is Fraser, Kenneth Fraser. I represent Transcontinental Insurance Association."

"Oh, no," I said. "I have all the insurance I need, thank you."

"No, no," he said. "I beg your pardon, I'm not here to *sell* insurance. I'm an investigator for the company."

"Oh, they all say that," I said, "and then when they get inside they *do* want to sell something. I remember one young man from an encyclopedia company—he swore up and down he was just taking a survey, and he no sooner—"

"Miss Wilson," Fraser said determinedly, "I am *definitely* not a salesman. I am not here to discuss your insurance with you, I am here to discuss Mr. Cunningham's insurance."

"Oh, I wouldn't know anything about that," I said. "I simply handled the paperwork in Mr. Cunningham's real estate office. His private business affairs he took care of himself."

"Miss Wilson, I—" He stopped, and looked up and down the hallway.

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"Do we have to speak out here?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know that there's anything for us to talk about," I said. I admit I was enjoying this.

"Miss Wilson, there *is* something for us to talk about." He put down the brief case and took out his wallet. "Here," he said. "Here's my identification."

I looked at the laminated card. It was very official and very complex and included Fraser's photograph, looking open-mouthed and stupid.

Fraser said, "I will *not* try to sell you insurance, nor will I ask you any details about Mr. Cunningham's handling of his private business affairs. That's a promise. Now, *may* I come in?"

It seemed time to stop playing games with him; after all, I didn't want him getting mad at me. He might go poking around too far, just out of spite. So I stepped back and said, "Very well then, young man, you may come in. But I'll hold you to that promise."

We went into the living room and I motioned at the sofa, saying, "Do sit down."

"Thank you." But he didn't seem to like the sofa when he sat on it, possibly because of the clear plastic cover it had over it.

"My nieces come by from time to time," I said. "That's why I have those plastic covers on all the furniture. You know how children can be."

"Of course," he said. He looked around, and I think the entire living room depressed him, not just the plastic cover on the sofa.

Well, it was understandable. The living room was a natural consequence of Miss Diane Wilson's personality, with its plastic slipcovers, the doilies on all the tiny tables, the little plants in ceramic frogs, the windows with venetian blinds *and* curtains *and* drapes, the general air of overcrowded neatness. Something like the house Mrs. Muskrat has in all those children's stories.

I pretended not to notice his discomfort. I sat down on the chair that matched the sofa, adjusted my apron and skirt over my knees, and said, "Very well, Mr. Fraser. I'm ready to listen."

He opened his brief case on his lap, looked at me over it, and said, "This may come as something of a shock to you, Miss Wilson. I don't know if you were aware of the extent of Mr. Cunningham's policy holdings with us."

"I already told you, Mr. Fraser, that I—"

"Yes, of course," he said hastily. "I wasn't asking, I was getting ready to tell you myself. Mr. Cunningham had three policies with us of various types, all of which automatically became due when he died."

"Bless his memory," I said.

"Yes. Naturally. At any rate, the total on these three policies comes to one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Gracious!"

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"With double indemnity for accidental death, of course," he went on, "the total payable is two hundred fifty thousand dollars. That is, one quarter of a million dollars."

"Dear me!" I said. "I would never have guessed."

Fraser looked carefully at me. "And you are the sole beneficiary," he said.

I smiled blankly at him, as though waiting for him to go on, then permitted my expression to show that the import of his words was gradually coming home to me. Slowly I sank back into the chair. My hand went to my throat, to the bit of lace around the collar of my dress.

"Me?" I whispered. "Oh, Mr. Fraser, you must be joking!"

"Not a bit," he said. "Mr. Cunningham changed his beneficiary just one month ago, switching from his wife to you."

"I can't believe it," I whispered.

"Nevertheless, it is true. And since Mr. Cunningham did die an accidental death, burning up in his real estate office, and since such a large amount of money was involved, the routine is to send an investigator around, just to be sure everything's all right."

"Oh," I said. I was allowing myself to recover. I said, "That's why you were so surprised when you saw me."

He smiled sheepishly. "Frankly," he said, "yes."

"You had expected to find some sexy young thing, didn't you? Someone Mr. Cunningham had been having an—a relationship with."

"The thought had crossed my mind," he said, and made a boyish smile. "I do apologize," he said.

"Accepted," I said, and smiled back at him.

It was beautiful. He had come here with a strong preconception, and a belief based on that preconception that something was wrong. Knock the preconception away and he would be left with an embarrassed feeling of having made a fool of himself. From now on he would want nothing more than to be rid of this case, since it would serve only to remind him of his wrong guess and the foolish way he'd acted when I'd first opened the door.

As I had supposed he would, he began at once to speed things up, taking a pad and pen from his brief case and saying, "Mr. Cunningham never told you he'd made you his beneficiary?"

"Oh, dear me, no. I only worked for the man three months."

"Yes, I know," he said. "It did seem odd to us."

"Oh, his poor wife," I said. "She may have neglected him but—"

"Neglected?"

"Well." I allowed myself this time to show a pretty confusion. "I shouldn't say anything against the woman," I went on. "I've never so much as laid eyes on her. But I do know that not once in the three months I worked there did she ever come in to see Mr. Cunningham, or

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even call him on the phone. Also, from some things he said—"

"What things, Miss Wilson?"

"I'd rather not say, Mr. Fraser. I don't know the woman, and Mr. Cunningham is dead. I don't believe we should sit here and talk about them behind their backs."

"Still, Miss Wilson, he did leave his insurance money to you."

"He was always the sweetest man," I said. "Just the sweetest man in the world. But why he would—" I spread my hands, to show bewilderment.

Fraser said, "Do you suppose he had a fight with his wife? Such a bad one that he decided to change his beneficiary, looked around for somebody else, saw you, and that was that."

"He was always very good to me," I said. "In the short time I knew him I always found Mr. Cunningham a perfect gentleman and the most considerate of men."

"I'm sure you did," he said. He looked at the notes he'd been taking, and muttered to himself. "Well, that might explain it. It's nutty, but—" He shrugged.

Yes, of course he shrugged. Kick away the preconception, leave him drifting and bewildered for just a second, and then quickly suggest another hypothesis to him. He clutched at it like a drowning man. Mr. Cunningham had had a big fight with Mrs. Cunningham. Mr. Cunningham had changed his beneficiary out of hate or revenge, and had chosen Miss Diane Wilson, the dear middle-aged lady he'd recently hired as his secretary. As Mr. Fraser had so succinctly phrased it, it was nutty, but—

I said, "Well, I really don't know what to say. To tell the truth, Mr. Fraser, I'm overcome."

"That's understandable," he said. "A quarter of a million dollars doesn't come along every day."

"It isn't the amount," I said. "It's how it came to me. I have never been rich, Mr. Fraser, and because I never married I have always had to support myself. But I am a good secretary, a willing worker, and I have always handled my finances, if I say so myself, with wisdom and economy. A quarter of a million dollars is, as you say, a great deal of money, but I do not *need* a great deal of money. I would much rather have that sweet man Mr. Cunningham alive again than have all the money in the world."

"Of course," he nodded, and I could see he believed every word I had said.

I went further. "And particularly," I said, "to be given money that should certainly have gone to his wife. I just wouldn't have believed Mr. Cunningham capable of such a hateful or vindictive action."

"He probably would have changed it back later on," Fraser said. "After he had cooled down. He only made the change three weeks before—before he passed on."

"Bless his soul," I said.

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"There's one final matter, Miss Wilson," he said, "and then I'll leave you alone."

"Anything at all, Mr. Fraser," I said.

"About Mr. Roche," he said. "Mr. Cunningham's former partner. He seems to have moved from his old address, and we can't find him. Would you have his current address?"

"Oh, no," I said. "Mr. Roche left the concern before I was hired. In fact, Mr. Cunningham hired me because, after Mr. Roche left, it was necessary to have a secretary in order to be sure there was always someone in the office."

"I see," he said. "Well—" He put the pad and pen back into the brief case and started to his feet, just as the doorbell rang.

"Excuse me," I said. I went out to the hallway and opened the door.

She came boiling in like a hurricane, pushing past me and shouting, "Where is she? Where is the hussy?"

I followed her into the living room, where Fraser was standing and gaping at her in some astonishment as she continued to shout and to demand to know where *she* was.

I said, "Madame, please. This happens to be my home."

"Oh, does it?" She stood in front of me, hands on hips. "Well then, you can tell me where I'll find the Wilson woman."

"Who?"

"Diane Wilson, the little tramp. I want to—"

I said, "I am Diane Wilson."

She stood there, open-mouthed, gaping at me.

Fraser came over then, smiling a bit, saying, "Excuse me, Miss Wilson, I think I know what's happened." He turned to the new visitor and said, "You're Mrs. Cunningham, aren't you?"

Still open-mouthed, she managed to nod her head.

Fraser identified himself, and said, "I made the same mistake you did—I came here expecting to find some vamp. But as you can see—" And he gestured at me.

"Oh, I *am* sorry," Mrs. Cunningham said to me. She was a striking woman in her late thirties. "I called the insurance company, and when they told me Ed had changed all his policies over to you, I naturally thought—well—you know."

"Oh, dear," I said. "I certainly hope you don't think—"

"Oh, not at all," Mrs. Cunningham said, and smiled a bit, and patted my hand. "I wouldn't think that of *you*," she said.

Fraser said, "Mrs. Cunningham, didn't your husband tell you he was changing the beneficiary?"

"He certainly didn't," she said with sudden anger. "And neither did that company of yours. They should have told me the minute Ed made that change."

Fraser developed an icy chill. "Madame," he said, "a client has the right to make anyone he chooses his beneficiary, and the company is

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under no obligation to inform anyone that—"

"Oh, that's all right," I said. "I don't need the money. I'm perfectly willing to share it with Mrs. Cunningham."

Fraser snapped around to me, saying, "Miss Wilson, you aren't under any obligation at all to this woman. The money is legally and rightfully yours." As planned, he was now 100 per cent on my side.

Now it was time to make him think more kindly of Mrs. Cunningham. I said, "But this poor woman has been treated shabbily, Mr. Fraser. Absolutely shabbily. She was married to Mr. Cunningham for—how many years?"

"Twelve," she said, "twelve years," and abruptly sat down on the sofa and began to sob.

"There, there," I said, patting her shoulder.

"What am I going to *do?*" she wailed. "I have no money, nothing! He left me nothing but debts! I can't even afford a decent burial for him!"

"We'll work it out," I assured her. "Don't you worry, we'll work it out." I looked at Fraser and said, "How long will it take to get the money?"

He said, "Well, we didn't discuss whether you want it in installments or in a lump sum. Monthly payments are usually—"

"Oh, a lump sum," I said. "There's so much to do right away, and then my older brother is a banker in California. *He'll* know what to do."

"If you're sure—" He was looking at Mrs. Cunningham, and didn't yet entirely trust her.

I said, "Oh, I'm sure this poor woman won't try to cheat me, Mr. Fraser."

Mrs. Cunningham cried, "Oh, God!" and wailed into her handkerchief.

"Besides," I said, "I'll phone my brother and have him fly east at once. He can handle everything for me."

"I suppose," he said, "if we expedite things, we could have your money for you in a few days."

"I'll have my brother call you," I said.

"Fine," he said. He hesitated, holding his brief case. "Mrs. Cunningham, are you coming along? Is there anywhere I can drop you?"

"Let the woman rest here a while," I said. "I'll make her some tea."

"Very well."

He left reluctantly. I walked him to the front door, where he said to me, quietly, "Miss Wilson, do me a favor."

"Of course, Mr. Fraser."

"Promise me you won't sign anything until your brother gets here to advise you."

"I promise," I said, sighing.

"Well," he said, "one more item and I'm done."

"Mr. Roche, you mean?"

"Right. I'll talk to him, if I can

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find him. Not that it's necessary." He smiled and said goodbye and walked away down the hall.

I closed the door, feeling glad he didn't think it necessary to talk to Roche. He would have found it somewhat difficult to talk to Roche, since Roche was in the process of being buried under the name of Edward Cunningham, his charred remains in the burned-out real estate office having been identified under that name by Mrs. Edward Cunningham.

Would Roche have actually pushed that charge of embezzlement he'd been shouting about? Well, the question was academic now, though three months ago it had seemed real enough to cause me to strangle the life out of him, real enough to cause me to set up this hasty and desperate—but, I think, rather ingenious—plan for getting myself out of the whole mess entirely. The only question had been whether or not our deep-freeze would preserve the body sufficiently over the three months of preparation, but the fire had settled that problem, too.

I went back into the living room. She got up from the sofa and said, "What's all this jazz about a brother in California?"

"Change of plans," I said. "I was too much the innocent, and you were too much the wronged woman. Without a brother, Fraser might have insisted on hanging around, helping me with the finances himself. And the *other* Miss Wilson is due back from Greece in two weeks."

"That's all well and good, Ed," my wife said. "But where is this brother going to come from? She doesn't have one, you know—the real Miss Wilson, I mean."

"I know." That had been one of the major reasons I'd hired Miss Wilson in the first place—aside from our general similarity of build—the fact that she *had* no relatives, making it absolutely safe to take over her apartment during my impersonation.

My wife said, "Well? What are you going to do for a brother?"

I took off the gray wig and scratched my head, feeling great relief. "I'll be the brother," I said. "A startling family resemblance between us."

She shook her head, grinning at me. "You are a one, Ed," she said. "You sure are a one."

"That's me," I said. "The sweetest man in the world."

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In THE GREAT MODERN AMERICAN STORIES *(1920), William Dean Howells wrote: "It wanted at least two generations to freeze our young blood with Mrs. Perkins Gilman's story of 'The Yellow Wall Paper,' of which Horace Scudder (then of 'The Atlantic') said in refusing it that it was so terribly good that it ought never to be printed . . . but I could not rest until I had corrupted the editor of 'The New England Magazine' into publishing it. Now I shiver over it as I did when I first read it in manuscript."*

Many years have passed—more than 60 since "The Yellow Wallpaper" was first published, more than 40 since William Dean Howells confessed his role in "saving" Mrs. Gilman's story—so you may not fully agree with Mr. Howells' evaluation and recurring reaction. But Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a masterpiece of its genre, and when you read (or reread) this fascinating and dangerous exploration of the senses, you will experience (or re-experience) the frisson nerveux *that only a classic tale of horror can inspire . . .*

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

by CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

IT IS VERY SELDOM THAT MERE ORDINARY people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps* —(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)— *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is re

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ally nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites —whichever it is—and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise and am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again.

Personally I disagree with their ideas.

Personally I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges, and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid; but I don't care—there is something strange about the house —I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a *draft,* and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty, old-fashioned chintz hangings; but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all

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care from me, and I feel so basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," he said, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery, at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playground and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the roof low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, prounounced enough to constantly irritate, and provoke study, and when you follow the lame, uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting—a smoldering, unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word . . .

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

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It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterward he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

"You know the place is doing you good," he said, "and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental."

"Then do let us go downstairs," I said. "There are such pretty rooms there."

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar if I wished, and would have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as any one need wish, and of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room—all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillowcase as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck

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and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside-down.

I got positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two edges didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have!

I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect, an enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely, shaded winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wallpaper has a kind of subpattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded, and where the sun is just so, I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to sulk about that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs . . .

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so

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we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Dr. Weir Mitchell in the fall.

But I don't want to go to him at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worthwhile to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else—only when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps *because* of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion.

I know a little of the principles of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the widths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way, each width stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of "debased Romanesque" with *delirium tremens*—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too—at least it seems so—and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal width for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the cross-lights fade and the low sun shines directly on it, I can almost fancy radiation, after all—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common center and

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rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess . . .

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wished he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and put me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till he tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let my silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort: the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wall-paper.

If we had not used it that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here, after all. I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I began to think—I wish John would take me away from here . . .

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It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around, just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes—it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why, darling!" he said. "Our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how we can leave before. The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, and your appetite is better. I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening, when you are here, but it is worse in the morning, when you are away."

"Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug. "She shall be as sick as she pleases. But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning."

"And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily.

"Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better."

"Better in body, perhaps—" I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind. There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?"

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't—I lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defi-

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ance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough—but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back somersault, and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples on you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light—in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight—it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind—that dim sub-pattern—but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me to sleep all I can.

Indeed, he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for, you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—oh, no!

The fact is, I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper she turned around as if she had been

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caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, and that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful.

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him that it was *because* of the wallpaper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough . . .

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is

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the *color* of the paper—a yellow smell!

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs around the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch,* as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy! . . .

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad . . .

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I *can't* do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer, now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

And though I always see her she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creep-

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ing as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind . . .

If only that top pattern could be got off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I won't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it . . .

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing!—but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight, and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me I declared I would finish it today!

We go away tomorrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not *alive!*

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too obvious! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but

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that great bedstead nailed down, with the mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs tonight, and take the boat home tomorrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now that it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down to the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will *not* move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides, I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper, as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an ax.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John, dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling."

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"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door, under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it, of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jennie! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Booton, Kage	RUNAWAY HOME	Doubleday	$3.95	2/17
Butler, Gwendoline	A NAMELESS COFFIN	Walker & Company	3.95	2/14
Creasey, John	THE DEPTHS	Walker & Company	3.95	2/21
Creasey, John	THE TOFF AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA	Walker & Company	3.95	1/27
Cross, James	TO HELL FOR HALF-A-CROWN	Random House	3.95	2/16
Foley, Rae	FEAR OF A STRANGER	Dodd, Mead	3.95	2/6
Gatenby, Rosemary	EVIL IS AS EVIL DOES	Morrow	3.75	1/30
Harvester, Simon	TREACHEROUS ROAD	Walker & Company	3.95	1/26
Healey, Ben	THE TERRIBLE PICTURES	Harper & Row	4.95	2/1
Hunt, Kyle	SLY AS A SERPENT	Macmillan	3.95	2/6
Jefferis, Barbara	ONE BLACK SUMMER	Morrow	4.50	2/20
Macdonald, Ross	ARCHER IN HOLLYWOOD	Alfred A. Knopf	6.95	2/20
McGerr, Patricia	MURDER IS ABSURD	Doubleday	3.95	2/10
Roberts, James Hall	THE FEBRUARY PLAN	Morrow	4.95	1/27
Spillane, Mickey	THE BODY LOVERS	E. P. Dutton	3.95	2/13
Taylor, Phoebe Atwood	DEATHBLOW HILL	W. W. Norton	3.95	1/30
Tilton, Alice	FILE FOR RECORD	W. W. Norton	3.95	1/30
van Gulik, Robert	THE PHANTOM OF THE TEMPLE	Chas. Scribner's	3.50	1/24
Wainwright, John	THE CRYSTALLISED CARBON PIG	Walker & Company	3.95	2/17
Walsh, Thomas	THE FACE OF THE ENEMY	Simon & Schuster	3.95	2/10
Welcome, John	WANTED FOR KILLING	Holt, Rinehart	3.95	2/22

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Bloch, Lawrence	THE CANCELLED CZECH	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .50	1/31
Bramlett, John	THE DEVIL IN BROAD DAYLIGHT	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	1/31
Eberhart, Mignon G.	THE PATTERN	Popular Library	.60	2/7
MacDonald, John D.	YOU LIVE ONCE	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	1/31
Queen, Ellery	HOW GOES THE MURDER?	Popular Library	.60	2/7

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We cannot resist quoting Anthony Boucher's editorial introduction to *The Adventure of Abraham Lincoln's Clue* in BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR: 21st Annual Collection. Mr. Boucher wrote: "Ellery Queen has written very nearly as many different types of detective stories as he has edited; but my favorites are largely those that might almost be called fantasies: tales of a looking-glass world in which people create the most improbable mystifications for the most unlikely reasons, yet always leaving some trail of mad logic for Ellery (and the reader) to follow—problems that are as unbelievable as they are acutely solvable. *The Adventure of Abraham Lincoln's Clue* is especially appealing because it involves two of the deepest passions of both Queen-the-character and Queen-the-author: the lives of Abraham Lincoln and Edgar Allan Poe.

"Ellery Queen appeared in BEST #18 with a long novelet, and in #19 and #20 with short-shorts. Now we have him in a regulation-length short story—and one of the most characteristic Queenly stories in his long and rich career."

THE ADVENTURE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S CLUE

by ELLERY QUEEN

FOURSCORE AND EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO, ABRAHAM LINCOLN BROUGHT *forth (in this account) a new notion, conceived in secrecy and dedicated to the proposition that even an Honest Abe may borrow a leaf from Edgar A. Poe.*

It is altogether fitting and proper that Mr. Lincoln's venture into the detective story should come to its final resting place in the files of a man named Queen. For all his life Ellery has consecrated Father Abraham as the noblest projection of the American dream; and, insofar as it has been within his poor power to add or detract, he has given full measure of devotion, testing whether that notion, or any notion so conceived and so dedicated, deserves to endure.

Ellery's service in running the Lincoln clue to earth is one the world has little noted nor, perhaps, will long remember. That he shall not have served in vain, this account:

The case began on the outskirts of an upstate-New York city with the

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dreadful name of Eulalia, behind the flaking shutters of a fat and curlicued house with architectural dandruff, recalling for all the world some blowsy ex-Bloomer Girl from the Gay Nineties of its origin.

The owner, a formerly wealthy man named DiCampo, possessed a grandeur not shared by his property, although it was no less fallen into ruin. His falcon's face, more Florentine than Victorian, was—like the house—ravaged by time and the inclemencies of fortune; but haughtily so, and indeed DiCampo wore his scurfy purple velvet house jacket like the prince he was entitled to call himself, but did not. He was proud, and stubborn, and useless; and he had a lovely daughter named Bianca, who taught at a Eulalia grade school and, through marvels of economy, supported them both.

How Lorenzo San Marco Borghese-Ruffo DiCampo came to this decayed estate is no concern of ours. The presence there this day of a man named Harbidger and a man named Tungston, however, is to the point: they had come, Harbidger from Chicago, Tungston from Philadelphia, to buy something each wanted very much, and DiCampo had summoned them in order to sell it. The two visitors were collectors, Harbidger's passion being Lincoln, Tungston's Poe.

The Lincoln collector, an elderly man who looked like a migrant fruit picker, had plucked his fruits well: Harbidger was worth about $40,000,000, every dollar of which was at the beck of his mania for Lincolniana. Tungston, who was almost as rich, had the aging body of a poet and the eyes of a starving panther, armament that had served him well in the wars of Poeana.

"I must say, Mr. DiCampo," remarked Harbidger, "that your letter surprised me." He paused to savor the wine his host had poured from an ancient and honorable bottle (DiCampo had filled it with California claret before their arrival). "May I ask what has finally induced you to offer the book and document for sale?"

"To quote Lincoln in another context, Mr. Harbidger," said DiCampo with a shrug of his wasted shoulders, " 'the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.' In short, a hungry man sells his blood."

"Only if it's of the right type," said old Tungston, unmoved. "You've made that book and document less accessible to collectors and historians, DiCampo, than the gold in Fort Knox. Have you got them here? I'd like to examine them."

"No other hand will ever touch them except by right of ownership," Lorenzo DiCampo replied bitterly. He had taken a miser's glee in his lucky finds, vowing never to part with them; now forced by his need to sell them, he was like a suspicion-caked old prospector who, stumbling at last on pay dirt, draws cryptic maps to keep the world from stealing the secret of its location. "As I informed you gentlemen, I represent the

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book as bearing the signatures of Poe and Lincoln, and the document as being in Lincoln's hand; I am offering them with the customary proviso that they are returnable if they should prove to be not as represented; and if this does not satisfy you," and the old prince actually rose, "let us terminate our business here and now."

"Sit down, sit down, Mr. DiCampo," Harbidger said.

"No one is questioning your integrity," snapped old Tungston. "It's just that I'm not used to buying sight unseen. If there's a money-back guarantee, we'll do it your way."

Lorenzo DiCampo reseated himself stiffly. "Very well, gentlemen. Then I take it you are both prepared to buy?"

"Oh, yes!" said Harbidger. "What is your price?"

"Oh, no," said DiCampo. "What is your bid?"

The Lincoln collector cleared his throat, which was full of slaver. "If the book and document are as represented, Mr. DiCampo, you might hope to get from a dealer or realize at auction—oh—$50,000. I offer you $55,000."

"$56,000," said Tungston.

"$57,000," said Harbidger.

"$58,000," said Tungston.

"$59,000," said Harbidger.

Tungston showed his fangs. "$60,000," he said.

Harbidger fell silent, and DiCampo waited. He did not expect miracles. To these men, five times $60,000 was of less moment than the undistinguished wine they were smacking their lips over; but they were veterans of many a hard auction-room campaign, and a collector's victory tasted very nearly as sweet for the price as for the prize.

So the impoverished prince was not surprised when the Lincoln collector suddenly said, "Would you be good enough to allow Mr. Tungston and me to talk privately for a moment?"

DiCampo rose and strolled out of the room, to gaze somberly through a cracked window at the jungle growth that had once been his Italian formal gardens.

It was the Poe collector who summoned him back. "Harbidger has convinced me that for the two of us to try to outbid each other would simply run the price up out of all reason. We're going to make you a sporting proposition."

"I've proposed to Mr. Tungston, and he has agreed," nodded Harbidger "that our bid for the book and document be $65,000. Each of us is prepared to pay that sum, and not a penny more."

"So that is how the screws are turned," said DiCampo, smiling. "But

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do not understand. If each of you makes the identical bid, which of you gets the book and document?"

"Ah," grinned the Poe man, "that's where the sporting proposition comes in."

"You see, Mr. DiCampo," said the Lincoln man, "we are going to leave that decision to you."

Even the old prince, who had seen more than his share of the astonishing, was astonished. He looked at the two rich men really for the first time. "I must confess," he murmured, "that your compact is an amusement. Permit me?" He sank into thought while the two collectors sat expectantly. When the old man looked up he was smiling like a fox. "The very thing, gentleman! From the typewritten copies of the document I sent you, you both know that Lincoln himself left a clue to a theoretical hiding place for the book which he never explained. Some time ago I arrived at a possible solution to the President's little mystery. I propose to hide the book and document in accordance with it."

"You mean whichever of us figures out your interpretation of the Lincoln clue and finds the book and document where you will hide them, Mr. DiCampo, gets both for the agreed price?"

"That is it exactly."

The Lincoln collector looked dubious. "I don't know . . ."

"Oh, come, Harbidger," said Tungston, eyes glittering. "A deal is a deal. We accept, DiCampo! Now what?"

"You gentlemen will of course have to give me a little time. Shall we say three days?"

Ellery let himself into the Queen apartment, tossed his suitcase aside, and set about opening windows. He had been out of town for a week on a case, and Inspector Queen was in Atlantic City attending a police convention.

Breathable air having been restored, Ellery sat down to the week's accumulation of mail. One envelope made him pause. It had come by airmail special delivery, it was postmarked four days earlier, and in the lower left corner, in red, flamed the word *URGENT*. The printed return address on the flap said: *L.S.M.B-R DiCampo, Post Office Box 69, Southern District, Eulalia, N.Y.* The initials of the name had been crossed out and "Bianca" written above them.

The enclosure, in a large agitated female hand on inexpensive notepaper, said:

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Dear Mr. Queen,

The most important detective book in the world has disappeared. Will you please find it for me?

Phone me on arrival at the Eulalia RR station or airport and I will pick you up.

Bianca DiCampo

A yellow envelope then caught his eye. It was a telegram, dated the previous day:

WHY HAVE I NOT HEARD FROM YOU STOP AM IN DESPERATE NEED YOUR SERVICES

BIANCA DICAMPO

He had no sooner finished reading the telegram than the telephone on his desk trilled. It was a long-distance call.

"Mr. Queen?" throbbed a contralto voice. "Thank heaven I've finally got through to you! I've been calling all day—"

"I've been away," said Ellery, "and you would be Miss Bianca DiCampo of Eulalia. In two words, Miss DiCampo: Why me?"

"In two words, Mr. Queen: Abraham Lincoln."

Ellery was startled. "You plead a persuasive case," he chuckled. "It's true, I'm an incurable Lincoln addict. How did you find out? Well, never mind. Your letter refers to a book, Miss DiCampo. Which book?"

The husky voice told him, and certain other provocative things as well. "So will you come, Mr. Queen?"

"Tonight if I could! Suppose I drive up first thing in the morning. I ought to make Eulalia by noon. Harbidger and Tungston are still around, I take it?"

"Oh, yes. They're staying at a motel downtown."

"Would you ask them to be there?"

The moment he hung up Ellery leaped to his bookshelves. He snatched out his volume of *Murder for Pleasure*, the historical work on detective stories by his good friend Howard Haycraft, and found what he was looking for on page 26:

And . . . young William Dean Howells thought it significant praise to assert of a nominee for President of the United States:

> The bent of his mind is mathematical and metaphysical, and he is therefore pleased with the absolute and logical method of Poe's tales and sketches, in which the

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> problem of mystery is given, and wrought out into every-day facts by processes of cunning analysis. It is said that he suffers no year to pass without a perusal of this author. Abraham Lincoln subsequently confirmed this statement, which appeared in his little known "campaign biography" by Howells in 1860 . . . The instance is chiefly notable, of course, for its revelation of a little suspected affinity between two great Americans . . .

Very early the next morning Ellery gathered some papers from his files, stuffed them into his brief case, scribbled a note for his father, and ran for his car, Eulalia-bound . . .

He was enchanted by the DiCampo house, which looked like something out of Poe by Charles Addams; and, for other reasons, by Bianca, who turned out to be a genetic product supreme of northern Italy, with titian hair and Mediterranean blue eyes and a figure that needed only some solid steaks to qualify her for Miss Universe competition. Also, she was in deep mourning; so her conquest of the Queen heart was immediate and complete.

"He died of a cerebral hemorrhage, Mr. Queen," Bianca said, dabbing at her absurd little nose. "In the middle of the second night after his session with Mr. Harbidger and Mr. Tungston."

So Lorenzo San Marco Borghese-Ruffo DiCampo was unexpectedly dead, bequeathing the lovely Bianca near-destitution and a mystery.

"The only things of value father really left me are that book and the Lincoln document. The $65,000 they now represent would pay off father's debts and give me a fresh start. But I can't find them, Mr. Queen, and neither can Mr. Harbidger and Mr. Tungston—who'll be here soon, by the way. Father hid the two things, as he told them he would; but where? We've ransacked the place."

"Tell me more about the book, Miss DiCampo."

"As I said over the phone, it's called *The Gift: 1845*. The Christmas annual that contained the earliest appearance of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*."

"Published in Philadelphia by Carey & Hart? Bound in red?" At Bianca's nod Ellery said, "You understand that an ordinary copy of *The Gift: 1845* isn't worth more than about $50. What makes your father's copy unique is that double autograph you mentioned."

"That's what he said, Mr. Queen. I wish I had the book here to show you—that beautifully handwritten *Edgar Allan Poe* on the flyleaf, and under Poe's signature the signature *Abraham Lincoln*."

"Poe's own copy, once owned, signed, and read by Lincoln," Ellery

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said slowly. "Yes, that would be a collector's item for the ages. By the way, Miss DiCampo, what's the story behind the other piece—the Lincoln document?"

Bianca told him what her father had told her.

One morning in the spring of 1865, Abraham Lincoln opened the rosewood door of his bedroom in the southwest corner of the second floor of the White House and stepped out into the red-carpeted hall at the unusually late hour—for him—of 7:00 A.M.; he was more accustomed to beginning his work day at six.

But (as Lorenzo DiCampo had reconstructed events) Mr. Lincoln that morning had lingered in his bedchamber. He had awakened at his usual hour but, instead of leaving immediately on dressing for his office, he had pulled one of the cane chairs over to the round table, with its gas-fed reading lamp, and sat down to reread Poe's *The Purloined Letter* in his copy of the 1845 annual; it was a dreary morning, and the natural light was poor. The President was alone; the folding doors to Mrs. Lincoln's bedroom remained closed.

Impressed as always with Poe's tale, Mr. Lincoln on this occasion was struck by a whimsical thought; and, apparently finding no paper handy, he took an envelope from his pocket, discarded its enclosure, slit the two short edges so that the envelope opened out into a single sheet, and began to write on the blank side.

"Describe it to me, please."

"It's a long envelope, one that must have contained a bulky letter. It is addressed to the White House, but there is no return address, and father was never able to identify the sender from the handwriting. We do know that the letter came through the regular mails, because there are two Lincoln stamps on it, lightly but unmistakably cancelled."

"May I see your father's transcript of what Lincoln wrote out that morning on the inside of the envelope?"

Bianca handed him a typewritten copy and, in spite of himself, Ellery felt goose-flesh rise as he read:

Apr. 14, 1865

Mr. Poe's The Purloined Letter is a work of singular originality. Its simplicity is a master-stroke of cunning, which never fails to arouse my wonder.

Reading the tale over this morning has given me a "notion." Suppose I wished to hide a book, this very book, perhaps? Where best to do so? Well, as Mr. Poe in his tale hid a letter *among letters*, might not a book be hidden *among books?* Why, if this very copy

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of the tale were to be deposited in a library and on purpose not recorded—would not the Library of Congress make a prime depository!—well might it repose there, undiscovered, for a generation.

On the other hand, let us regard Mr. Poe's "notion" turn-about: suppose the book were to be placed, not amongst other books, but *where no book would reasonably be expected?* (I may follow the example of Mr. Poe, and, myself, compose a tale of "ratiocination"!)

The "notion" beguiles me, it is nearly seven o'clock. Later to-day, if the vultures and my appointments leave me a few moments of leisure, I may write further of my imagined hiding-place.

In self-reminder: the hiding-place of the book is in 30d, which

Ellery looked up. "The document ends there?"

"Father said that Mr. Lincoln must have glanced again at his watch, and shamefacedly jumped up to go to his office, leaving the sentence unfinished. Evidently he never found the time to get back to it."

Ellery brooded. Evidently indeed. From the moment when Abraham Lincoln stepped out of his bedroom that Good Friday morning, fingering his thick gold watch on its vest chain, to bid the still-unrelieved night guard his customary courteous "Good morning" and make for his office at the other end of the hall, his day was spoken for. The usual patient push through the clutching crowd of favor-seekers, many of whom had bedded down all night on the hall carpet; sanctuary in his sprawling office, where he read official correspondence; by 8:00 A.M. having breakfast with his family —Mrs. Lincoln chattering away about plans for the evening, 12-year-old Tad of the cleft palate lisping a complaint that "nobody asked me to go," and young Robert Lincoln, just returned from duty, bubbling with stories about his hero Ulysses Grant and the last days of the war; then back to the presidential office to look over the morning newspapers (which Lincoln had once remarked he "never" read, but these were happy days, with good news everywhere), sign two documents, and signal the soldier at the door to admit the morning's first caller, Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax (who was angling for a Cabinet post and had to be tactfully handled); and so on throughout the day—the historic Cabinet meeting at 11:00 A.M., attended by General Grant himself, that stretched well into the afternoon; a hurried lunch at almost half-past two with Mrs. Lincoln (had this 45-pounds-underweight man eaten his usual midday meal of a biscuit, a glass of milk, and an apple?); more visitors to see in his office (including the unscheduled Mrs. Nancy Bushrod, escaped slave and wife

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of an escaped slave and mother of three small children, weeping that Tom, a soldier in the Army of the Potomac, was no longer getting his pay: "You are entitled to your husband's pay. Come this time tomorrow," and the tall President escorted her to the door, bowing her out "like I was a natural-born lady"); the late afternoon drive in the barouche to the Navy Yard and back with Mrs. Lincoln; more work, more visitors, into the evening . . . until finally, at five minutes past 8:00 P.M., Abraham Lincoln stepped into the White House formal coach after his wife, waved, and sank back to be driven off to see a play he did not much want to see, *Our American Cousin*, at Ford's Theatre . . .

Ellery mused over that black day in silence. And, like a relative hanging on the specialist's yet undelivered diagnosis, Bianca DiCampo sat watching him with anxiety.

Harbidger and Tungston arrived in a taxi to greet Ellery with the fervor of castaways grasping at a smudge of smoke on the horizon.

"As I understand it, gentlemen," Ellery said when he had calmed them down, "neither of you has been able to solve Mr. DiCampo's interpretation of the Lincoln clue. If I succeed in finding the book and paper where DiCampo hid them, which of you gets them?"

"We intend to split the $65,000 payment to Miss DiCampo," said Harbidger, "and take joint ownership of the two pieces."

"An arrangement," growled old Tungston, "I'm against on principle, in practice, and by plain horse sense."

"So am I," sighed the Lincoln collector, "but what else can we do?"

"Well," and the Poe man regarded Bianca DiCampo with the icy intimacy of the cat that long ago marked the bird as its prey, "Miss DiCampo, who now owns the two pieces, is quite free to renegotiate a sale on her own terms."

"Miss DiCampo," said Miss DiCampo, giving Tungston stare for stare, "considers herself bound by her father's wishes. His terms stand."

"In all likelihood, then," said the other millionaire, "one of us will retain the book, the other the document, and we'll exchange them every year, or some such thing." Harbidger sounded unhappy.

"Only practical arrangement under the circumstances," grunted Tungston, and *he* sounded unhappy. "But all this is academic, Queen, unless and until the book and document are found."

Ellery nodded. "The problem, then, is to fathom DiCampo's interpretation of that *30d* in the document. 30d . . . I notice, Miss DiCampo—or, may I? Bianca?—that your father's typewritten copy of the Lincoln

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holograph text runs the *3* and *O* and *d* together—no spacing in between. Is that the way it occurs in the longhand?"

"Yes."

"Hmm. Still . . . 30d . . . Could *d* stand for *days* . . . or the British *pence* . . . or *died*, as used in obituaries? Does any of these make sense to you, Bianca?"

"No."

"Did your father have any special interest in, say, pharmacology? chemistry? physics? algebra? electricity? Small *d* is an abbreviation used in all those." But Bianca shook her splendid head. "Banking? Small *d* for *dollars*, *dividends*?"

"Hardly," the girl said with a sad smile.

"How about theatricals? Was your father ever involved in a play production? Small *d* stands for *door* in playscript stage directions."

"Mr. Queen, I've gone through every darned abbreviation my dictionary lists, and I haven't found one that has a point of contact with any interest of my father's."

Ellery scowled. "At that—I assume the typewritten copy is accurate—the manuscript shows no period after the *d*, making an abbreviation unlikely. 30d . . . let's concentrate on the number. Does the number 30 have any significance for you?"

"Yes, indeed," said Bianca, making all three men sit up. But then they sank back. "In a few years it will represent my age, and that has enormous significance. But only for me, I'm afraid."

"You'll be drawing wolf whistles at twice thirty," quoth Ellery warmly. "However! Could the number have cross-referred to anything in your father's life or habits?"

"None that I can think of, Mr. Queen. And," Bianca said, having grown roses in her cheeks, "thank you."

"I think," said old Tungston testily, "we had better stick to the subject."

"Just the same, Bianca, let me run over some 'thirty' associations as they come to mind. Stop me if one of them hits a nerve. The Thirty Tyrants—was your father interested in classical Athens? Thirty Years War—in Seventeenth Century European history? Thirty all—did he play or follow tennis? Or . . . did he ever live at an address that included the number 30?"

Ellery went on and on, but to each suggestion Bianca DiCampo could only shake her head.

"The lack of spacing, come to think of it, doesn't necessarily mean that Mr. DiCampo chose to view the clue that way," said Ellery thoughtfully. "He might have interpreted it arbitrarily as *3*-space-*O-d*."

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"Three od?" echoed old Tungston. "What the devil could that mean?"

"Od? Od is the hypothetical force or power claimed by Baron von Reichenbach—in 1850, wasn't it?—to pervade the whole of nature. Manifests itself in magnets, crystals, and such, which according to the excited Baron explained animal magnetism and mesmerism. Was your father by any chance interested in hypnosis, Bianca? Or the occult?"

"Not in the slightest."

"Mr. Queen," exclaimed Harbidger, "are you serious about all this—this semantic sludge?"

"Why, I don't know," said Ellery. "I never know till I stumble over something. Od . . . the word was used with prefixes, too—*biod*, the force of animal life; *elod*, the force of electricity; and so forth. *Three* od . . . or *triod*, the triune force—it's all right, Mr. Harbidger, it's not ignorance on your part, I just coined the word. But it does rather suggest the Trinity, doesn't it? Bianca, did your father tie up to the Church in a personal, scholarly, or any other way? No? That's too bad, really, because Od—capitalized—has been a minced form of the word God since the Sixteenth Century. Or . . . you wouldn't happen to have three Bibles on the premises, would you? Because—"

Ellery stopped with the smashing abruptness of an ordinary force meeting an absolutely immovable object. The girl and the two collectors gawped. Bianca had idly picked up the typewritten copy of the Lincoln document. She was not reading it, she was simply holding it on her knees; but Ellery, sitting opposite her, had shot forward in a crouch, rather like a pointer, and he was regarding the paper in her lap with a glare of pure discovery.

"That's it!" he cried.

"What's it, Mr. Queen?" the girl asked, bewildered.

"Please—the transcript!" He plucked the paper from her. "Of course. Hear this: 'On the other hand, let us regard Mr. Poe's "notion" turn-about. *Turn-about*. Look at the 30d 'turn-about'—as I just saw it!"

He turned the Lincoln message upside down for their inspection. In that position the 30d became:

POƐ

"*Poe*!" exploded Tungston.

"Yes, crude but recognizable," Ellery said swiftly. "So now we read the Lincoln clue as: 'The hiding-place of the book is in *Poe*'!"

There was a silence.

"In Poe," said Harbidger blankly.

"In Poe?" muttered Tungston. "There are only a couple of trade editions

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of Poe in DiCampo's library, Harbidger, and we went through those. We looked in every book here."

"He might have meant among the Poe books in the *public* library. Miss DiCampo—"

"Wait." Bianca sped away. But when she came back she was drooping. "It isn't. We have two public libraries in Eulalia, and I know the head librarian in both. I just called them. Father didn't visit either library."

Ellery gnawed a fingernail. "Is there a bust of Poe in the house, Bianca? Or any other Poe-associated object, aside from books?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Queer," he mumbled. "Yet I'm positive your father interpreted 'the hiding-place of the book' as being 'in Poe.' So he'd have hidden it 'in Poe' . . ."

Ellery's mumbling dribbled away into a tormented sort of silence: his eyebrows worked up and down, Groucho Marx-fashion; he pinched the tip of his nose until it was scarlet; he yanked at his unoffending ears; he munched on his lip . . . until, all at once, his face cleared; and he sprang to his feet. "Bianca, may I use your phone?"

The girl could only nod, and Ellery dashed. They heard him telephoning in the entrance hall, although they could not make out the words. He was back in two minutes.

"One thing more," he said briskly, "and we're out of the woods. I suppose your father had a key ring or a key case, Bianca? May I have it, please?"

She fetched a key case. To the two millionaires it seemed the sorriest of objects, a scuffed and dirty tan leatherette case. But Ellery received it from the girl as if it were an artifact of historic importance from a newly discovered IV Dynasty tomb. He unsnapped it with concentrated love; he fingered its contents like a scientist. Finally he decided on a certain key.

"Wait here!" Thus Mr. Queen; and exit, running.

"I can't decide," old Tungston said after a while, "whether that fellow is a genius or an escaped lunatic."

Neither Harbidger nor Bianca replied. Apparently they could not decide, either.

They waited through twenty elongated minutes; at the twenty-first they heard his car, champing. All three were in the front doorway as Ellery strode up the walk.

He was carrying a book with a red cover, and smiling. It was a compassionate smile, but none of them noticed.

"You—" said Bianca. "—found—" said Tungston. "—the book!" shouted Harbidger. "Is the Lincoln holograph in it?"

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"It is," said Ellery. "Shall we all go into the house, where we may mourn in decent privacy?"

"Because," Ellery said to Bianca and the two quivering collectors as they sat across a refectory table from him, "I have foul news, Mr. Tungston, I believe you have never actually seen Mr. DiCampo's book. Will you now look at the Poe signature on the flyleaf?"

The panther claws leaped. There, toward the top of the flyleaf, in faded inkscript, was the signature *Edgar Allan Poe.*

The claws curled, and old Tungston looked up sharply. "DiCampo never mentioned that it's a full autograph—he kept referring to it as 'the Poe signature.' Edgar *Allan* Poe . . . Why, I don't know of a single instance after his West Point days when Poe wrote out his middle name in an autograph! And the earliest he could have signed this 1845 edition is obviously when it was published, which was around the fall of 1844. In 1844 he'd surely have abbreviated the 'Allan,' signing 'Edgar *A.* Poe,' the way he signed everything! This is a forgery."

"My God," murmured Bianca, clearly intending no impiety; she was as pale as Poe's Lenore. "Is that true, Mr. Queen?"

"I'm afraid it is," Ellery said sadly. "I was suspicious the moment you told me the Poe signature on the flyleaf contained the 'Allan.' And if the Poe signature is a forgery, the book itself can hardly be considered Poe's own copy."

Harbidger was moaning. "And the Lincoln signature underneath the Poe, Mr. Queen! DiCampo never told me it reads *Abraham* Lincoln—the full Christian name. Except on official documents, Lincoln practically always signed his name '*A.* Lincoln.' Don't tell me this Lincoln autograph is a forgery, too?"

Ellery forbore to look at poor Bianca. "I was struck by the 'Abraham' as well, Mr. Harbidger, when Miss DiCampo mentioned it to me, and I came equipped to test it. I have here—" and Ellery tapped the pile of documents he had taken from his briefcase "—facsimiles of Lincoln signatures from the most frequently reproduced of the historic documents he signed. Now I'm going to make a precise tracing of the Lincoln signature on the flyleaf of the book—" he proceeded to do so "—and I shall superimpose the tracing on the various signatures of the authentic Lincoln documents. So."

He worked rapidly. On his third superimposition Ellery looked up. "Yes. See here. The tracing of the purported Lincoln signature from the flyleaf fits in minutest detail over the authentic Lincoln signature on this facsimile of the Emancipation Proclamation. It's a fact of life that's tripped many a forger that *nobody ever writes his name exactly the same way twice.* There are

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always variations. If two signatures are identical, then, one must be a tracing of the other. So the 'Abraham Lincoln' signed on this flyleaf can be dismissed without further consideration as a forgery also. It's a tracing of the Emancipation Proclamation signature.

"Not only was this book not Poe's own copy; it was never signed—and therefore probably never owned—by Lincoln. However your father came into possession of the book, Bianca, he was swindled."

It was the measure of Bianca DiCampo's quality that she said quietly, "Poor, poor father," nothing more.

Harbidger was poring over the worn old envelope on whose inside appeared the dearly beloved handscript of the Martyr President. "At least," he muttered, "we have *this*."

"Do we?" asked Ellery gently. "Turn it over, Mr. Harbidger."

Harbidger looked up, scowling. "No! You're not going to deprive me of this, too!"

"Turn it over," Ellery repeated in the same gentle way. The Lincoln collector obeyed reluctantly. "What do you see?"

"An authentic envelope of the period! With two authentic Lincoln stamps!"

"Exactly. And the United States has never issued postage stamps depicting living Americans; you have to be dead to qualify. The earliest U.S. stamp showing a portrait of Lincoln went on sale April 15, 1866—a year to the day after his death. Then a living Lincoln could scarcely have used this envelope, with these stamps on it, as writing paper. The document is spurious, too. I am so very sorry, Bianca."

Incredibly, Lorenzo DiCampo's daughter managed a smile with her "*Non importa, signor.*" He could have wept for her. As for the two collectors, Harbidger was in shock; but old Tungston managed to croak, "Where the devil did DiCampo hide the book, Queen? And how did you know?"

"Oh, that," said Ellery, wishing the two old men would go away so that he might comfort this admirable creature. "I was convinced that DiCampo interpreted what we now know was the forger's, not Lincoln's, clue, as *30d* read upside down; or, crudely, *Poe*. But 'the hiding-place of the book is in Poe' led nowhere.

"So I reconsidered. P, o, e. If those three letters of the alphabet didn't mean Poe, what could they mean? Then I remembered something about the letter you wrote me, Bianca. You'd used one of your father's envelopes, on the flap of which appeared his address: *Post Office Box 69, Southern District, Eulalia, N. Y.* If there was a Southern District in Eulalia, it seemed reasonable to conclude that there were post offices for other points of the

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compass, too. As, for instance, an Eastern District. Post Office Eastern, P.O. East. P.O.E."

"Poe!" cried Bianca.

"To answer your question, Mr. Tungston: I phoned the main post office, confirmed the existence of a Post Office East, got directions as to how to get there, looked for a postal box key in Mr. DiCampo's key case, found the right one, located the box DiCampo had rented especially for the occasion, unlocked it—and there was the book." He added, hopefully, "And that is that."

"And that *is* that," Bianca said when she returned from seeing the two collectors off. "I'm not going to cry over an empty milk bottle, Mr. Queen. I'll straighten out father's affairs somehow. Right now all I can think of is how glad I am he didn't live to see the signatures and documents declared forgeries publicly, as they would surely have been when they were expertized."

"I think you'll find there's still some milk in the bottle, Bianca."

"I beg your pardon?" said Bianca.

Ellery tapped the pseudo-Lincolnian envelope. "You know, you didn't do a very good job describing this envelope to me. All you said was that there were two cancelled Lincoln stamps on it."

"Well, there are."

"I can see you misspent your childhood. No, little girls don't collect things, do they? Why, if you'll examine these 'two cancelled Lincoln stamps,' you'll see that they're a great deal more than that. In the first place, they're not separate stamps. They're a vertical pair—that is, one stamp is joined to the other at the horizontal edges. Now look at this upper stamp of the pair.'

The Mediterranean eyes widened. "It's upside down, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's upside down," said Ellery, "and what's more, while the pair have perforations all around, there are no perforations between them, where they're joined.

"What you have here, young lady—and what our unknown forger didn't realize when he fished around for an authentic White House cover of the period on which to perpetrate the Lincoln forgery—is what stamp collectors might call a double printing error: a pair of 1866 black 15-cent Lincolns imperforate horizontally, with one of the pair printed upside down. No such error of the Lincoln issue has ever been reported. You're the owner Bianca, of what may well be the rarest item in U.S. philately, and the most valuable."

The world will little note, nor long remember.

But don't try to prove it by Bianca DiCampo.

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Ed and Mary Jolly had been a headline vaudeville act; but talking pictures had killed vaudeville, and the Jollys hadn't performed professionally for 30 years. Now they were retired and ran a combination gas station, General Store, snack bar, and tavern on the desert. But even after 30 years the Jollys missed the glitter and the excitement of show business. Life could be dull in the desert, miles from nowhere, a long way from civilization, with only an occasional car breaking the silence . . .

THE JOLLY JUGGLERS, RETIRED

by RICHARD DEMING

THEY COULD HEAR THE CAR COMing long before its headlights would appear around the curve circling Indian Butte, because the clear desert air carried sound a remarkable distance. By the sound, it was traveling along the narrow gravel road at an unsafe speed.

"Must be city folk," old Ed Jolly said to his wife. "Be here in ten minutes at the speed they're going, if they don't hit one of them potholes in the road. If they do, might not get here at all."

His head cocked for listening, he preoccupiedly lifted four apples from a box lying on the counter on the grocery side of the combination General Store, snack bar, and tavern, and began expertly juggling them. He was still lean and erect despite his 75 years, and his hands were almost as supple as they had been 30 years ago.

Mary Jolly, only a few months younger than her husband, was also in excellent health for her age. Her body had thinned out and lost its once lissome figure, but there was still a twinkle in her eye and the vestiges of a spring in her step.

Standing several feet away, she eyed the arcing apples as they circled in the air from one hand to the other. Suddenly she raised her left hand and chanted, "A-one and a-two and away and go!"

Grinning, Ed continued to toss and catch the apples until the last word of the incantation; then they suddenly sped toward his wife in such a rapid stream that two were in the air all the time. Expertly plucking each apple from the air as it reached her and tossing it upward, she started juggling them. When Ed raised his hand, they streamed back to him. He juggled them twice, then caught them and dropped them back into the box.

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"We could still wow them if there was any vaudeville left," he said. "I better get outside."

By its sound he judged the car was now just beyond Indian Butte when he switched on the gas pumps. He knew it would stop, because cars coming from the east always did. Except for ranch houses, the Jollys' filling station and General Store was the only sign of civilization for the 125 miles from Ripple City in that direction, and for the 65 miles to the nearest town west.

Headlights appeared from around the curve circling the butte just east of the store. The car slowed and swung into the filling station. It was a new but dust-laden four-door sedan with four men in it.

Bringing the car to a stop before the gas pump, the driver said, "Fill 'er up, Pop."

The four men got out to stretch. They were all somewhere between 30 and 40 and all were dressed in darkly conservative business suits.

As Ed inserted the hose nozzle into the tank vent, the driver, a lean thin-faced man with a large nose, said, "How far's Hooker's Gap, Pop?"

"Sixty-five miles."

The driver glanced at a wrist watch, then turned to a stocky man with heavy features and thick flat lips who had climbed from the back seat. "It's not quite ten yet, Mark. We'll be in well before midnight."

The stocky man nodded. He said to Ed Jolly, "You're really isolated out here, old-timer. How do you make a living?"

"Oh, a dozen or more cars a day take this road," Ed said. "Everyone stops, because there's no place else to go. Most generally they have a drink or a snack besides buying gas, and a lot of them buy stuff from the store. We have a little grocery department, mainly for the convenience of nearby ranches, but tourists buy stuff too. Then we got a couple of sleeping rooms that people rent now and then."

"A drink, you say?" a gaunt, emaciated, and chinless man asked. "You got a bar here?"

Before Ed could reply, the stocky man said in a definite tone, "Nothing doing, Sliver. There'll be no drinking until our business is finished."

The fourth man, short and burly and red-faced, said, "You live out here all alone, Pop?"

"No, my wife Mary's inside, in case you want a snack and some coffee."

No one took the suggestion. The stocky man named Mark gazed around. Noting the dim outline of the big structure behind the store, he asked, "What's that building?"

Following the direction of his gaze, Ed said, "Barn. We don't use it, except to garage our pickup. Fellow owned this place before us raised a little livestock on the side. We keep a few chickens, is all."

The stocky man continued to

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gaze around, his expression contemplative. "You have two sleeping rooms, you say?"

"Uh-huh. One double bed and one twin bed, so folks can take their choice on how they want to sleep. Five dollars a night per person, with breakfast thrown in."

The tank overflowed. Ed cut the valve and hung up the hose. He cleaned the windshield, then asked, "Check under the hood?"

The lean driver said, "No, it's okay," and glanced at the amount registered on the pump.

It registered $3.10. The driver handed Ed four $1 bills.

"Keep the change, Pop."

"Well, thanks," Ed said. "Mighty good of you."

"Let's get moving," the stocky man said crisply, and climbed in back.

As though they were soldiers obeying the command of a superior officer, the other three immediately climbed in too. Ed watched the twin taillights out of sight, then shut off the gas pumps and went back inside to report the ninety-cent tip to Mary.

"Must be businessmen going to a conference somewhere," he guessed. "Stocky fellow seemed to be the boss—at least, the others all snapped to when he spoke up. Probably the company president, and the others all work for him."

He plucked an apple from the box on the counter, tossed it in the air, caught it behind his back, then started eating it.

Just before 4:30 the following afternoon the sound of a car traveling at high speed came from the west. Ed, who had nearly perfect pitch although he had never attempted to develop his potential musical talent, recognized the engine sound.

"Those business fellows coming back," he said to Mary. "Maybe this time they'll have a snack."

He was waiting at the pumps when they drove in. The car didn't pull up before the pumps, however. It swung in before the entrance to the General Store. Three of the men got out, the driver remaining behind the wheel. The stocky Mark carried a black, obviously heavy satchel.

"Get our overnight bags from the trunk," Mark ordered the two who had got out of the car with him. Then he said to the driver, "Park it in the barn, Joey and be sure to close the door."

Ed, who had come over from the pumps, looked at the stocky man inquiringly.

"We've decided to rent your two sleeping rooms," the man said. "You don't mind if we use your barn as a garage, do you?"

"Course not," Ed said. "Plenty of room. There's nothing in it but our old pickup."

Joey, the driver, had handed his keys through the window to the emaciated and chinless man called Sliver. The latter unlocked the car

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trunk, lifted out four overnight bags slammed the trunk lid, and handed back the keys. The burly, red-faced man picked up two of the bags, Sliver picked up the other two, and they went into the store.

Joey started the car engine, backed and swung into the dirt lane leading to the barn. Ed followed the stocky Mark inside. The other two had set down the overnight bags just inside the door, but Mark hung on to the heavy satchel.

Mary was behind the snack counter.

"This here is my wife, Mary," Ed said. "My name's Ed Jolly, incidentally. Mary, these gentlemen and a fourth one who's putting the car in the barn want to stay the night."

"How do you do, gentlemen?" Mary said courteously.

The red-faced man and the gaunt Sliver muttered barely audible greetings. Mark said, "Glad to know you, Mrs. Jolly. My name is Mark Jones. This is Sliver Smith and Puffy Brown." He indicated first the gaunt, chinless man, then the red-faced one. "The guy who will be along in a minute is Joey Black."

Mary smiled acknowledgment of the introductions and came from behind the counter. "I'll show you the rooms and let you decide who sleeps in which."

Mary led the way through the door leading to the back hallway off which were their own bedroom, the two guest rooms, and the bath. Sliver Smith and Puffy Brown picked up the four overnight bags and followed. Mark brought up the rear.

The lean thin-faced Joey came in the front door.

"My wife is showing the others the rooms," Ed said. He pointed to the door leading to the rear hallway. "You'll find them through there, Mr. Black."

"Huh?" Joey said. "Oh, yeah. Sure."

He disappeared through the indicated doorway. Ed rubbed his chin and frowned.

When Mary reappeared, alone, a few minutes later, she was delightedly clutching two $100 bills.

"They're going to stay several days," she said breathlessly. "Mr. Jones paid me ten days in advance and said if they leave sooner, we can keep the change. I tried to tell him we'd adjust the rate for so long a period, but he said never mind."

Ed was still frowning in the direction of the rear hall. After 55 years of marriage, Mary was sensitive to his moods almost to the point of being able to read his mind.

"What's the matter?" she asked quickly.

"That fellow Joey—the driver. His name isn't Black. When I called him Mr. Black, he looked blank. Then he caught on that the stocky fellow had told me that name and covered up."

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Mary gazed at him puzzledly. "You're sure?"

"Uh-huh. Think about the other names—Jones, Smith, Brown. Funny that four fellows traveling together should all have such common names. And why would they want to spend several days here? There's no hunting or fishing around here, nothing to do but look at the desert."

Mary studied his face with dawning understanding. "You think—you think they may be criminals hiding from the law?"

"I don't know, but I think I'll phone the Sheriff's office and ask somebody to come out and give them a look-see."

The stocky Mark returned trailed by his three companions. He stopped before Ed and Mary while the other three took seats at the bar.

"You say about a dozen cars a day stop here, Mr. Jolly?"

"About," Ed said.

"Then I think we'd better have a little rehearsal before the next customer arrives. We're very retiring men, Mr. Jolly. We hate a lot of people around, so we prefer that no one learns we're your guests. Understand?"

Ed was afraid he did, but he let his face assume a puzzled expression. "No."

"I'll make it plainer. As far as possible I want you to service your customers *outside*—keep them *out* of the store. To tourists you can just explain that the place is closed down for alterations. Anybody you happen to know well enough so that the news might surprise them, let them come in and serve them. State Troopers or Deputy Sheriffs, for instance. We'll remain out of sight in the back, and you won't mention our being here. All clear?"

Ed narrowed his eyes. "Why should I steer business away?"

The thick flat lips spread in a humorless smile. "Because if you cooperate, nothing will happen to your wife. While you are serving customers, Mrs. Jolly will remain with us, Mr. Jolly. If anyone inquires about her during daylight hours, just say she's taking a nap. After dark just say she's in bed for the night. Any attempt to pass on a message for some customer to relay to the cops will have most unfortunate results. I guarantee it."

He turned toward the bar. "Sliver, show the Jollys your favorite plaything."

The gaunt, emaciated Sliver dipped a hand into his coat pocket and brought it out again. There was a click and a thin razor-edged blade seven inches long sprang into view.

"Get the point?" the stocky Mark asked.

Mary's gaze was fixed on the blade in fascination. Ed gulped.

"I get it," he said.

"Fine. Now if you cooperate, nobody will get hurt. We'll be here a few days, then take off. Of course

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we'll have to cut your phone line and take along the distributor cap of your pickup truck so that we can get a reasonable headstart before you run to the cops. But we'll pay you generously for your trouble."

Ed felt a sense of relief. At least the men planned no physical harm unless he and Mary attempted to cross them. He decided the safest course was to do as the man called Mark said.

The sound of a car engine came from the west.

Mark said crisply, "Sliver, take Mrs. Jolly in back. Joey, you and Puffy get out of sight too. I'll keep watch from the window to see how the old man behaves."

The three men herded Mary before them into the rear hallway. The stocky man drew a black automatic from beneath his arm and let his eyes glitter at Ed.

"I'll have my eye on you when you go out there, Mr. Jolly. If whoever that is wants to come in, and it's somebody who might get suspicious if you said the store was closed, okay. But I'll be in that back hall, right alongside the door, listening. Just keep thinking of Sliver's little plaything."

"I will," Ed assured him.

He went outside just as the approaching car pulled into the gas station. His heart began to thump when he saw it was a State Trooper's car.

There were two uniformed men in the car, and Ed knew them both. They were from the barracks just outside of Hooker's Gap. The driver, a young man named Ross Miller, was a sergeant. His companion, a muscular man named Harry Forbes, was a lieutenant.

The car pulled clear of the pumps, parking near the store entrance. Both officers got out.

"Hello, Ross," Ed said. "Hi Lieutenant."

Both men gave him friendly greetings. The Lieutenant said, "Seen anything of a car with four men in it Mr. Jolly?"

"Today?" Ed asked.

"Uh-huh. They'd have been coming from the direction of Hooker's Gap."

Ed shook his head. "Only been four cars from that direction so far today, Lieutenant. Two was couples with kids, one had two women together, and the other was Burt Lacey from the Double-Bar ranch."

"Any cars go by without stopping?"

Ed shook his head again. "Seldom happens 'way out here. I'd have known even if I was inside. You can hear them miles away."

Lieutenant Forbes reached into the front seat to lift out the dashboard mike and briefly reported in that the suspects hadn't gone by way of the road past the Jollys' store. After hanging up the mike, he suggested to his partner that they have a cup of coffee before heading back to Hooker's Gap.

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Ed's heart was in his throat as he led them inside. The store was empty, but the door to the rear hall was open a crack. Silently he went behind the snack counter and poured two cups of coffee.

As he set them before the State Troopers, Ross Miller asked, "Where's Mrs. Jolly?"

"Taking a little nap," Ed said. "What you looking for these fellows for?"

"They knocked over the bank at Hooker's Gap just at closing time, couple of hours ago. Killed a teller and got away with forty-two thousand dollars. There was so much on hand because Friday is the day the bank makes up the payroll for the Bishop mine. We don't know what they're driving, because they stole a local car for the job. We found it abandoned on the north road out of town, where they apparently switched cars. Probably they headed north. It would have been dumb to head this way, because there's no place to turn off for two hundred miles and we've got a roadblock set up at the far end. But we had to check it out."

The bank robbers had been clever, Ed realized. They had deliberately taken an apparently suicidal escape route because they knew the police would pay little attention to it other than bottling up its far end. And now that the police were convinced the men had not come this way, probably the roadblock at Ripple City would be lifted and the robbers could drive on through in perfect safety.

"What these fellows look like, in case they come by here?" Ed asked.

The Lieutenant shrugged. "Just four men of assorted shapes and sizes in dark suits. Two were heavy-set, two skinny. Nobody saw their faces because they wore nylon stockings over their heads. The taller of the heavy-set men shot the teller. No reason for it either. Just because he didn't move as fast as he was ordered to. Cut him down in cold blood. Young fellow who'd only been married three weeks."

Ed felt a chill climb along his spine. The description of the killer fitted the leader of the gang, Mark. And if he was that callous a killer, his reassuring words about merely cutting the phone line and taking along the pickup's distributor cap had been designed only to lull Ed and Mary into more willing cooperation.

Ed suddenly thought of something which he reproached himself for not having thought of before. Disabling the pickup and cutting the phone line wouldn't assure the bandits any headstart. A customer might appear within minutes of the fugitives' departure, and while the nearest town was sixty-five miles away, there was a ranch house with a phone less than ten miles from the General Store.

Mark certainly would have thought of this. Ed became certain that the stocky man had no inten-

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tion of leaving two live witnesses behind when the gang departed.

He was frantically searching his mind for some way to tip off the State Troopers that the fugitives were in the building without getting both police officers shot down when they simultaneously drained their cups and tossed dimes on the counter.

"They won't be coming this way now," the Lieutenant said as he headed for the door. "So you don't have to worry. See you, Mr. Jolly."

Ross Miller, following the Lieutenant, called over his shoulder, "Give Mrs. Jolly my regards."

Then they were gone and so was Ed's opportunity to signal that something was wrong.

As the State Troopers' car drove away, Mark came from the back hall, putting away his gun.

"You did fine, old man," he said. "Just keep up the good work with any other customers."

Ed silently resolved to use the first gas customer who came along as a means of getting word of the Jollys' danger to the police. Mentally he rehearsed how he would stand with his back to the store, so that the watching Mark couldn't see his lips moving, and what he would say.

"Please don't glance toward the store," he would say. "There's a man with a gun covering us through the window. Don't try to answer me. Just listen. Get to the nearest phone and call the police." (Here he would give directions to the nearest ranch, depending on which way the car was headed.) "Tell them the four men who robbed the bank in Hooker's Gap are hiding out here. They've threatened to kill my wife if I don't cooperate, so warn them to move in cautiously."

That should do it, he thought. There was the risk that Mark would realize that Ed had violated orders and would kill him and Mary in revenge, but he was convinced the man intended to kill them anyway. This way they would at least have a fighting chance.

Ed never had an opportunity to put his plan in operation, because no other cars came along. By dark he had lost hope. They sometimes had customers after nightfall, and even occasionally were awakened to serve someone in the middle of the night, but it was a rare occurrence. Few people cared to travel the isolated desert road at night, for fear of becoming stranded in darkness miles from any possible help.

Nightfall was early at this time of year. It was already dark when Mary served dinner for everyone at 6:30. After dinner, as Mary washed dishes behind the snack counter, the four men sat at the liquor bar.

"You can serve us one drink each, Mr. Jolly," Mark said. "That's going to be the limit, boys, because we're moving on at midnight."

As he walked behind the bar, Ed again felt a chill climb his spine.

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That meant he and Mary had only five hours to live. And he hadn't even had a chance to warn her of what was coming, because they had never been allowed to be alone.

The red-faced Puffy said, "I thought we was gonna hole up here for a couple of days."

"We were, until those state cops radioed in that we hadn't come this way. The roadblock at Ripple City's probably been lifted by now. It's a cinch to be lifted by the time we hit there."

Ed said huskily, "What do you want to drink?"

They all ordered bourbon straight, with water chasers. Ed poured the drinks and waited. No one made any effort to pay. Apparently now that his cooperation was no longer essential, the pretense of being paying customers was over.

Probably they would take back the $200 and clean out the till when they left, Ed thought. Not that it would make any difference.

Mary came from behind the snack counter and went over to the grocery department, where she began scanning the shelves.

"We're most out of pork and beans, Ed," she called. "Better bring out about six cans."

Restocking the canned goods shelves was a nightly game they played, but tonight Ed wasn't in much of a mood for games. Dispiritedly he went into the storeroom.

When he emerged, he was juggling six cans of pork and beans. The four men at the bar watched in astonishment as the cans made a blurred circle in the air from one hand to the other.

When he had walked to within twelve feet of the waiting Mary, juggling the cans on the way, she chanted, "A-one and a-two and away and go!"

The cans suddenly took a horizontal motion, forming a continuous streak toward her. Rhythmically she plucked each from the air as it arrived, flipped it into her other hand, and plunked it onto the shelf.

The men at the bar were staring open-mouthed. All four had swung around on their stools with their backs to the bar.

Mark said, "That's the damnedest thing I ever saw. Where'd you old codgers learn a trick like that?"

"You're all too young to remember The Jolly Jugglers," Ed said with an air of dignity. "We were vaudeville headliners before you were born."

"With that act you still could be," Mark said. "What happened?"

Ed made a wry face. Mary said, "A thing called talking pictures. Our last good year was 1929. Our last theater booking was in 1932. We played carny for a few years after that, but it was really all over."

"What the devil is carny?" Sliver asked.

"Carnivals," Ed said.

Mark said, "We've got several

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hours to fool away. We might as well have some amusement. How about you folks putting on your whole act for us?"

The two old people looked at each other. Mary smiled.

"Why not?" she said. "We haven't performed before an audience in years."

Ed had a sudden wild thought. If only he could get Mary alone long enough to explain what he had in mind, it just possibly might work.

"All right," he said to her. "Come help me carry in the props."

"Sliver can help you," Mark said. "She stays here."

That quashed that. As he preceded the gaunt Sliver back to the bedroom that he and Mary shared, Ed decided to go ahead with his plan anyway, and hope that somehow he could get across to Mary what he had in mind.

In the bedroom Ed opened the closet door and dragged out the box containing the Indian clubs. It was pretty heavy, because it contained a dozen of the tapered, round-ended wooden clubs. Sliver helped him carry the box back into the store, then resumed his seat at the bar.

Mary looked puzzled when Ed drew four of the brightly painted clubs from the box and handed them to her. The Indian clubs had always been the finale of their act, but he had left the juggling balls, dishes, and rods in the closet.

Ed gazed at her steadily, hoping she wouldn't ask why he hadn't brought the other paraphernalia out first. Her near ability to read his mind worked. Obviously she didn't understand it, but he sensed that she understood he didn't want her to question him.

Removing four more clubs from the box, he positioned himself at one end of the bar and about six feet away from it. Mary positioned herself at the other end.

"We used to juggle all twelve," Ed said in an apologetic tone. "But we're getting a little old. Eight still isn't bad. A lot of juggling teams never got over six."

"Get on with the show," Mark said impatiently.

Ed held three clubs in his left hand, one in his right. He flipped the single one end-over-end into the air, quickly transferred another to his right hand, and flipped it. The third and fourth followed these into the air also, the last one leaving his right hand just as gravity brought the first one down into his left hand.

The spinning clubs formed a colorful pinwheel which Mary watched until its rhythm was established in her mind. Then she began to juggle her four clubs in similar rhythm so that her right hand was tossing a club into the air at exactly the same instant one left Ed's right hand, her left hand catching one at the same instant his did.

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"A-one and a-two and away and go!" she chanted.

At the word *go* the clubs took on a horizontal motion, shooting in a tumbling stream from her right hand to Ed's left, while a stream from his right hand shot toward her. Back and forth the eight clubs spun, forming a glittering pattern in the air.

"Hey rube at the count of go!" Ed chanted.

He could see Mary's eyes widen at the carny expression, "Hey rube" —the traditional call for help when the carnival was threatened. Her eyes sought his, read his mind, and she nodded.

"A-one and a-two and away and go!" Ed intoned.

Both shifted their feet to half face the bar and the twin streams of spinning clubs suddenly spurted in that direction. Mark, seated nearest to Ed, took the heavy butt of the first one squarely in the center of his forehead and tumbled to the floor like a poled ox. Sliver, next in line, slid from his stool with incredible swiftness, ducked the second club, and darted a hand beneath his coat. The third club smashed between his eyes.

With the fourth club poised for throwing, Ed looked to see how Mary was doing. Joey the driver was unconscious on the floor. The red-faced Puffy was on his knees wearing a groggy expression, but still conscious enough to claw for the gun beneath his arm.

Ed's fourth club went spinning end-over-end and thunked solidly against Puffy's temple. Puffy pitched forward on his face.

Ed and Mary nodded sadly.

"I'm getting old," she said. "I didn't connect solidly with any but the first throw. I hit him with the other three, but they were all glancing blows."

"We're both a little rusty," he agreed. "Go call the Sheriff. I'll collect their guns."

He stooped over each unconscious man, relieved him of his gun, and carried them all behind the bar. The Indian club which Sliver had ducked had sailed into the backbar, smashing a couple of bottles of whiskey, and now lay on the floor behind the bar.

Ed picked it up, came from behind the bar, and gathered up the other seven clubs. He lay four on the end of the bar and held the other four, three in his left hand, the fourth in his right.

He had never trusted guns. He felt safer with the Indian clubs.

When Mary returned from the phone, she picked up the four clubs from the bar and aligned herself next to him. They were still standing there when Sheriff's Deputies arrived.

All four of the bank robbers had regained consciousness by then, but they still lay on the floor. As each had awakened he had decided against moving as soon as Ed and Mary began juggling their clubs.

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Every so often in the Twentieth Century (and perhaps even in the second half of the Nineteenth), various smug and scholarly critics, writers, historians, and organizations have promulgated learned lists of the "Do's and Don'ts" of the Mystery Craft wherein certain plot devices have been banned as no longer suitable for the genre. Too hackneyed, the pundits said; overworked and no longer sensitive to variation, they proclaimed. And every such list we have seen contained the prohibition: Don't use twins.

Well, the simple truth is, it's foolhardy and presumptuous to rule out any plot idea, however old or familiar, so long as writers keep their sense of ingenuity and sustain their imaginative powers. No basic plot conception has become so outworn, so trite and stereotyped, that it is no longer capable of a fresh wrinkle.

Here, then, to prove the point, is a new mystery story about—of all things!—identical twins. And we guarantee that you have never read anything quite *like it before . . .*

A STRANGER'S TALE

by JOSEPH MATHEWSON

I RARELY SPEAK TO STRANGERS; for I think of my life as a balanced equation now, and I have no desire to deal with unknown quantities. But after dinner at the inn where I was staying, at Worthing on the Channel, I felt the need of companionship. And that was why I spoke to Arthur Fortescue.

He was alone on the open veranda that looks across the Channel, reading despite the failing light. And the little light there was could only have reached him dimly, since the glasses he wore were tinted a golden green. The lenses were perfectly round, and they gave his face, with its long jaw and its high forehead, a look of gnomic wisdom, rather like that of the Easter Island statues.

The rest of him was much less forbidding. He was neatly dressed in a loose tweed suit that flattered his lanky form. From the neck down he appeared to be at ease; from the neck up he appeared to be about my age—forty or so.

On strolling by him I saw that he was reading Libowitz's *A Theory of Genetic Structure*, a magnificent work, but one which no layman could possibly endure beyond its opening paragraphs. Since my own research in London often touches on

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the field of genetics, I supposed that the man and I would have at least one common point for discussion, and accordingly I introduced myself.

Fortescue was affable and apparently as eager to talk as I was. It seemed, indeed, almost as though there lurked behind the façade of his stony face an imprisoned voice which was seldom allowed to communicate but did so with a desperate alacrity whenever it was given the chance.

Closing the book, he asked me to join him. I sat down in the wicker chair to his right, and we ordered brandies and talked for a time of our work—not closely allied, but closely enough so that each could grasp what the other was saying, an all too rare experience with scientists today. Fortescue spoke extremely well; but engaging as he was, I kept recalling the incident that had made me turn to a stranger for companionship and diversion. And at last I brought it up.

It had happened that afternoon, just as I was leaving the beach that lies in front of the inn. I was gathering up my books and towels when I saw three people walking my way on the otherwise deserted stretch of sand. They were two boys of six or seven, obviously identical twins, and a woman who was probably their mother. All three were dressed in white, she in a shift, the twins in polo shirts and shorts; and all three shared a Nordic perfection of coloring; skin a healthy tan, hair so blond it was nearly white, and eyes a deep-sea blue. That last detail I noticed only by staring as they passed—intently, I fear, though they appeared to be as unaware of my interest as they were of my existence.

They seemed to form a perfect unity, a oneness of thought and action that excluded me and possibly excluded the beach and the Channel and the sky as well. And the beauty of their self-containment filled me with a sense of loneliness such as I have never known since my early days at school. They moved as in a dream, barefoot and silent, and wandered off, becoming at last no more than gilded motes, slowly consumed by the bright cerulean sky of early fall.

Fortescue listened politely, then adroitly changed the subject to the incidence of multiple births. I could tell he was heading for one of the new drugs—DNA or some such topic; but I was somehow compelled to keep us talking of twins. So changing the subject back—not at all adroitly, I'm afraid—I said that I had always wanted a brother, and more than that a twin brother, the closest I could imagine to an ideal soulmate.

"I know exactly what you mean," he said. "But there can be terrible pain in having another so close. And the impulse that causes a mother to dress her twin sons alike—it's understandable, of course, but the result can be tragic."

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"It might be comic if she overdoes it," I said. "But tragic?"

"I know of a case."

He paused for a moment, sunk in thought, till I said, guessing that he needed urging, "Yes?"

"I said I know of a case. But it's such a long story."

Intrigued, I said I'd be glad to hear it.

"Would you?" Fortescue set his brandy on the taboret between us. "Very well," he said, and straightened himself in his chair, his body assuming the stiffness that his face had never lost. As he spoke, he rarely looked at me, fixing his gaze on the rising tide and the gathering storm that approached us over the Channel. But his voice, far from being distant or mechanical, was warm and immensely compelling.

"I knew these twins quite well," he said. "Eric and Edgar Harley they were, the sons of a gentleman who lived at Gorham Hall, a graystone pile not far from Egton on the North York Moors. Their mother had died in childbirth; and since they were his only children, Harley loved them even more than a father usually loves his sons. He may have loved them overmuch. But who's to say? They were, in any event, his hopes, his dreams, his whole world.

"And from early on it looked as though the boys would justify all his faith in them. They were strong and healthy with an active spirit, and both of them had fine good looks. They had their mother's coal-black eyes as well as her titian hair, and their father prayed that they had inherited everything from her; for the Harleys had a family history of insanity.

"The twins seemed likely to grow up six feet tall or more, and both of them were excellent at sports. They learned to swim and ride as soon as they could walk, and a short while after that their father gave them guns for hunting on the moors. Hunting was one of Harley's keenest pleasures, and he was rich; so he hired a gamekeeper who lived in a cottage a quarter mile from Gorham Hall—lived there with his wife."

"His wife?" I said. "I gathered from *Lady Chatterley* that gamekeepers never married."

"Would to God this one hadn't. But that gets me ahead of my story." He picked up his brandy glass and held it between his hands to warm the amber liquid. "There was more to their life than sports, though," he continued. "Harley was an educated man—Harrow, Balliol, and then Gray's Inn for law. He carried on a casual practice in Egton, more to amuse himself than for any other reason. And he wanted his sons to be barristers, too. It was assumed from the day of their birth, in fact, that the boys would follow his course from school to school. And they were all so close at first that the boys could think of nothing they would rather do than walk in their father's steps—which is unsurprising, since Harley

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made the walk sound jolly and full of adventure.

"Harley remembered what it was he had most enjoyed, and that was what he passed along to them, leaving out the Latin verbs and the canings they were sure to get at Harrow. He told them about the thrill of trouncing Eton at cricket, and about his high old times at Oxford. I suspect that the Oxford tales were expurgated, though, since Harley was quite a rake. But to boys like Eric and Edgar, punting on the Isis and playing darts at the Turf were every bit as exotic as sneaking ladies over the walls of Balliol."

Fortescue sipped from his snifter, then lit up a meerschaum pipe which illumined his face from time to time and showed it to be unchanging. A yellow light from inside the inn extended palely halfway across the veranda; but aside from that we were in total darkness.

"So," he went on, "all went well for about ten years. The three of them had the unity that you admire so much. But suddenly the ties that bound them together began to fray. For the boys were growing older, and the older they grew the more apparent it became that they were far from identical.

"Both were very good at sports, as I believe I mentioned, but Eric proved to be the better of the two. He was also the more romantic, while Edgar inclined more to the studious. And to make matters worse, from Harley's point of view, Edgar developed an interest in science that made him think less and less of the law as his chosen career.

"I say from Harley's point of view because these variations troubled him profoundly. He had always dressed the boys alike, of course. But now he developed a positive mania for seeing that they were alike in every respect. If Eric's bag of grouse was bigger than Edgar's, or if Edgar got a better report than Eric from their tutor, Harley would lose control of himself and rage at the 'backward' son.

"His angry spells were brief to start with, but later they began to last for days on end. And they were fearsome affairs, horribly destructive of the love and mutual trust he had worked so hard to produce. But they had at least one good effect—they drew Eric and Edgar closer together than before. To avoid their father's wrath, you see, they engaged in countless conspiracies to make it seem that in no respect did one excel the other. They were soulmates, indeed, and so they continued up to the age of seventeen, when the first of the accidents happened."

"Was Harley losing his mind?" I asked. "You said the change came suddenly."

"Umm." Fortescue lit his pipe again. "Looks as though it'll storm," he said. "Would you care to move inside?"

A steady breeze was blowing in

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our faces. But I found it a blessing after the automobile fumes which pass for air in London, and I was warmly cozy, sunk in my wicker chair. "Not unless you'd rather," I said.

"It suits me here. But we might have another round of brandy—yes?" He tapped the bell on the taboret, and a waiter appeared from the door on our left, took our order and vanished.

We sat for a time in silence, while I became more and more curious. Finally I said, "Was the first accident a bad one?"

"It was ghastly. The boys had been at Harrow for five years by then, and were ready to go up to Oxford. Or Edgar was, even though he'd done the least work possible, while Eric had swotted as hard as he could and still had made only a poorish record. Edgar had been admitted to Balliol, while Eric would have to be tutored for at least a year; and it was doubtful he would make it even then.

"They returned to Gorham Hall for the summer, both quite tense, since they knew that Eric was in for a hell of a row with their father. Poor boys, they should have been so happy, both at the peak of their youth, grown to their full height, handsome as young gods, open-hearted and cheerful. They had so much to look forward to, despite their father, and Eric no less than Edgar. He was slower at study, yes, but far the faster with women, you see. And when he had last been home, Smathers, the game keeper, had been away at York; and Eric had fallen in with Mrs. Smathers, who was little more than a trollop but exceedingly attractive, if you like the Rubens type.

"Later she and Eric corresponded secretly, the woman writing him vows of love which were only semi-literate but passionate enough to capture Eric completely. So the boy supposed he would have a week of scenes with Harley, a tutor in the mornings and the rest of the summer free to dally with Mrs. Smathers on the moors.

"They arrived on a day in early June that was everything a day in June should be but rarely is in the north. Gorham Hall looked almost white in the sunlight, and the broad expanse of lawn that ran from the house to an artificial lake was green and smooth as a billiard table. That was where Edgar waited while Eric was seeing their father, passing the time by tossing a stick to Ranger, a retriever who was almost as old as the twins.

"The sun was going down when Eric came out at last, and Edgar was heartily tired of the play. But he kept it up to divert his brother, since conversation seemed out of the question.

"Neither Eric nor Harley ever mentioned what passed between them that afternoon, though the interview must have been far more brutal than anything Eric had

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steeled himself to receive. He was perfectly ashen when he came out. His hands shook badly, and a dull, pained look had put out the fire in his eyes.

"But he saw the point of Edgar's game, and he joined in gladly, shouting and calling to Ranger, who hadn't had such fun in years. The dog was wild with joy to have his masters back, and not knowing which he should run to first, he paused with the stick in his mouth. Both boys made a grab for the stick. Each got a half, and they started to tussle, falling to the grass, rolling around and letting out the tensions of the day in shouts and laughter that ended suddenly with a fearful scream from Eric; for somehow the stick had wedged itself in the turf—upright—and in thrashing about, Eric had pierced his eye on the point.

"He was rushed to a doctor in Egton, but he lost the eye, the left one."

A bolt of lightning flashed across the sky, and I felt as though my own eye had been wounded. Instinctively, I raised a hand to my face; then, realizing the foolishness of the gesture, I tried to pass it off, saying, "Ghastly, yes. But you really can't blame Harley for the accident."

"Not for that—no. But there was more to come. In a week or so Eric was back at Gorham Hall—at least, he was back in a physical sense, though scarcely in any other. He seemed to be still in shock, a condition that only got worse as the summer dragged along; and each day he grew a little more distant from Edgar. Formerly, the two had rarely been apart for more than several hours. But now Eric would disappear for the better part of the day, never saying where he was going or why.

"Edgar was deeply hurt by this radical change in his brother, though he guessed that Eric was whiling away the time with Mrs. Smathers. And if she were therapeutic, he thought, then he shouldn't object to being left alone. Yet Eric always came home at night with such a gloomy look that Edgar found it hard to believe his twin had been making love. And at last he decided to question Eric about her, trying to make a joke of it. He said he was proud his brother could entertain a woman for seven hours a day and not collapse with fatigue.

"At that, Eric did collapse. He was completely incoherent for a while, but Edgar finally gathered that Mrs. Smathers had thrown him over the very first day he'd come back from the hospital. She had told him never to see her alone again, hinting in her vulgar way that she had another man who satisfied her better. Beastly woman, really.

"It's impossible to say how much damage she did to the boy, weak as he was, but he was clearly shaken almost to the breaking point. Edgar consoled him as best he could, and the two were as close for the rest

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of the day as they had ever been in the past. The following day, however, Eric wandered off again, alone. The distance between them that Edgar had hoped to close had simply gotten wider, and with each successive day it grew wider still.

"And as if that weren't enough unhappiness for Edgar, his father became increasingly more querulous and demanding. It was as if Harley felt himself responsible for Eric's accident; and to make amends, he bent over backward trying to show Eric how much he loved him. At the same time, though, his treatment of Edgar tended to be unreasonably critical. Whatever Edgar was doing, whether reading a book or riding a horse, his father found an excuse for taking him to task till it almost seemed that Edgar, the more accomplished twin, was out of step, while Eric was the perfect type of what their father had wanted in his sons. But Eric was seldom around to receive his father's overtures of peace, and he always rejected them moodily whenever he was at home, which only made Harley redouble his efforts.

"Lord, what a dreadful summer. The tension at Gorham Hall was almost palpable—it was like another member of the household. And the heat was brutal for weeks on end."

The waiter arrived with our brandies and set them down on the bench at Fortescue's left. Fortescue, deep in thought, appeared not to notice the waiter; and though my glass was nearly empty, I hesitated to interrupt by asking for a full one. Instead, I waited in silence, relishing the increasing force of the wind and the waves.

The tide had swept up ten yards closer to where we sat. The lightning flashes came with greater frequency, followed by resounding claps of thunder. And thus when Fortescue spoke again, he had to combat the cacophony of the elements in a louder tone which gave his tale an added note of urgency.

"It was late in August," he said. "The day was hotter than any before, the hottest of any that summer; for the heat wave broke that very night. Edgar was reading on an old chaise longue he had pulled up in the shade of an oak by a corner of the house. He was alone, so far as he knew. Harley had left after lunch, saying he had some legal work at his office in Egton, and Eric was elsewhere, had been since breakfast.

"Edgar was reading Darwin—*The Voyage of the Beagle.* He still has the book, though why he keeps it, all covered with blood—"

"Blood? But why?"

"Because, as he lay there, someone crept up on his left and threw a dart which struck him in the eye. It was a good true shot, the shot of a practiced hand. And since its intent was clearly to put out the eye, it was also a most successful shot.

"Bleeding profusely and almost swooning with pain, Edgar yelled for help. Smathers heard him at last

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and drove him into Egton where the doctor who had taken out Eric's eye took out Edgar's. Before that happened, though, Edgar had the presence of mind to hide the dart. He later invented a story to explain what happened, a flimsy story, but no one questioned it too closely."

"He was protecting his father?"

"Of course. The boys had never played at darts, while Harley, by his own account, had been a whiz at Oxford. Knowing the family weakness, Edgar supposed that his father had suffered an attack and done what he could to make his twin sons identical again. When Edgar learned that Harley had not been near his office that afternoon, his supposition appeared to be confirmed. And yet he could never bring himself to accuse his father of the gruesome act. The ties of love still held, however badly frayed.

"They held even when Edgar had reason to fear for his life—when his father told him that Eric was dead."

I drank the last of my brandy to ward against the cold that was creeping through my body, then waited once more in silence.

"The Coroner's Jury called Eric's death an accident. As they reconstructed the sequence of events, Eric had gone back to Gorham Hall after Smathers had taken Edgar away. He had settled himself in the gun room, and in cleaning his rifle had blown out his brains. But despite the lack of a suicide note, Edgar knew in his heart that his twin brother had not been able to stand the double loss of his eye and Mrs. Smathers, that his mind had snapped and suicide had followed.

"You can well imagine his consternation. Believing his father so far deranged as to deliberately put out his own son's eye, Edgar could scarcely keep himself from believing that Harley might want his living son to join his dead one under an identical graystone cross.

"Wretched boy, he lived in torment till late September, when he left at last for Oxford. Nor did Harley do anything to lessen Edgar's agony. He ordered Eric's room locked, keeping the only key for himself. And Edgar could often hear him there at two or three in the morning, pacing up and down and moaning aloud in broken phrases, in meaningless words. Often, too, Edgar could see his father kneeling for an hour at a time by Eric's grave in the family plot. The sight of him there was dispiriting enough. But to Edgar it was preferable that his father be where he could see him, not hidden in the gloom of Gorham Hall with a rifle in his hands.

"By the time he got to Balliol, Edgar was close to nervous prostration. The combination of fear, grief, and physical pain had left him pale and thin. He stooped pathetically, like a man four times his age. He seldom slept, and his good eye constantly twitched, a sort of frantic semaphore of suffering. But there's something restorative about the at-

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mosphere at Oxford—as you may know."

"I was at Trinity, Cambridge."

"Umm. Well there is, and it had its salutary effect on Edgar. It may be the air of timelessness, the feeling when you're there that you're not really part of this day and age, though you're not really out of it, either. But be that as it may, Edgar slowly improved, slowly found it easier to rationalize, to make excuses for Harley. And toward the first of November, what with the Oxford atmosphere and the help of his friends from Harrow, he was as nearly his old self as he'd ever be.

"Then one day, out of the blue, Harley telephoned and asked Edgar to bring some friends to Gorham Hall for a week-end shooting party."

"Good Lord, no," I said—or chattered, rather, chilled right through to the marrow. The storm raged all around us now, though the rain had not yet begun to fall. But Fortescue showed no sign of wanting to leave the veranda, and I could not endure the thought of moving before his tale was finished.

"Edgar invented every excuse he could think of for staying away. But Harley sounded so sane and loving, and more than that so lonely, that Edgar gave in at last. He had confided his secret fears to no one, but he thought that two of the boys who had been with him at Harrow realized the depths of his distress. He knew he could count on their aid and comfort; so he asked the lads to join him, and the three set off for Gorham Hall.

"Dinner that night was reassuring, masculine, and hearty. Harley seemed as sane as he'd sounded on the telephone, and that was a great relief to his son. But Edgar was even more relieved in the morning when the four of them, with Smathers, took to the moors at dawn; for the party was arranged with his father holding the extreme right of the line, while Edgar himself held the extreme left, separated from Harley by fifty yards and the three other hunters.

"The morning was damp and overcast, and a light fog lay on the moors. But the shooting was fairly good. Edgar's spirits began to rise, and it wasn't till an hour after lunch that the threat of murder touched him again. Then he felt himself engulfed in an icy wave of panic. He had suddenly realized, you see, that only three guns were firing in addition to his own.

"The fog had closed in thickly by now, and he could see no one but Smathers to his immediate right. He shouted to the gamekeeper, asking where his father was. Smathers said Harley was resting and would probably join them later. His voice sounded terribly distant, even though the man was scarcely more than thirty feet away. The shots of Edgar's friends were dullish thuds that barely impinged on his consciousness.

"Then suddenly nothing existed

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for Edgar's tortured mind but the fog and his father and home. Like a fox with the hounds on its tail, his only thought was to go to ground, to hide in his room at Gorham Hall.

"Pausing only once to stare about, Edgar half ran, half stumbled across the moors, falling now and again, cutting himself, bleeding and sweating, fighting the fog as though it could hold him back. But at last he sighted the row of oaks that lined the road from the Smathers cottage to Gorham Hall.

"He had almost reached it, gasping for breath, when his father loomed up out of the mist, some twenty feet ahead. He seemed to be holding a gun. The boy's response was a reflex action, of course, and he shot the old man instantly. Then Edgar fainted dead away.

"It was some days after the funeral before Edgar recovered consciousness, and it was months before he was well. But during that time a jury acquitted him of any guilt in his father's death. Shooting accidents are common on the moors, and the incidents that made this accident uncommon were never brought out. So Edgar left the hospital free to do what he pleased and the master of a fairly large estate."

"Free in one sense, yes," I said. "But he must have felt enormous guilt, even though he was justified in the murder."

"Ah, but he wasn't—not completely justified. When he took possession of Gorham Hall, you see, he had his brother's room unlocked. And there he noticed that a board was loose in one of the closet floors. He pulled it up, idly, and found in the space underneath a bull's-eye target, every inch of it covered with tiny holes. Five darts lay beside the target."

"Did they match the one that hit him?"

"They did indeed. Exactly."

"So when Eric was off by himself, he was practicing?"

"Apparently."

"Then Harley was innocent."

"No, not completely innocent. It was, as I've said, partly the loss of the Smathers woman that affected Eric's mind. I suspect he may have thought that Edgar was his rival, when in fact it was Harley himself. His father was with her on the day that Eric put out his brother's eye; that's why he wasn't in his office. And he was just returning from her bed when Edgar shot him down."

"But why did Harley have a gun?"

"It wasn't a gun at all, just a cane to help him through the fog."

"So he was partly guilty."

"Partly, yes." Fortescue relaxed for the first time since he had started his strange narrative, but his gaze remained on the surging tide. At last he said, "Didn't we order some brandy?"

"It's there on the bench."

Fortescue turned his head to the left. "Didn't notice," he said. "I can't see out of that eye."

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a *NEW* Uncle George story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Here is Hugh Pentecost's newest story about one of his favorite locales—Lakeview, U.S.A.

Uncle George had a heart as big as the whole outdoors. Would his compassion shake, even topple, the objectivity so necessary to being a detective? Or would it help him to look even deeper into the causes of criminality?

And to complicate Uncle George's thinking and feeling, to worry and gnaw at his passion for fair play, there was always his personal knowledge of the dire penalties which inevitably followed a miscarriage of justice . . .

THE MONSTER OF LAKEVIEW

by HUGH PENTECOST

IT WAS ALMOST AN ORDINARY August Saturday in the town of Lakeview—a lazy, humid, unbustling Saturday. It differed from the norm only in that there were fewer people on the streets and in the stores than is customary on a week-end. This was explained by the fact that this particular Saturday was the last day of the Bridgehampton Fair, which was being held about 30 miles away.

On this day there would be the drawings for the bright new 1967 convertible with bucket seats and "four-on-the-floor"; the prizes would be awarded in the cattle show and flower show and for the vegetable display. There would be trotting races, and the various rides and games would be going full blast until after 10:00 in the evening.

It was always a great day for children of all ages.

But there was one child in the town of Lakeview who didn't go to the Fair that Saturday. Charlie Milton didn't go. He had never been to the Fair in all his life. Most people didn't think of Charlie as a child any more. He was 23 years old and he stood six feet three inches tall and weighed a solid muscular 220 pounds. But, tragically, Charlie Milton was a child for all that: he had the mental capacities of a not very bright three-year-old.

It was ironic that multi-millionaire Robert Milton who had engaged the finest medical help in the world was helpless to do anything for his handsome, gentle, cheerful, empty

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son. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Charlie together.

The Miltons had come to Lakeview 20 years ago and had bought a large tract of land on the outskirts of town. There Robert Milton had built an impressive Colonial house, with gracious lawns and beautiful shade trees. Here they lived—the father, the wheel-chair imprisoned mother, and Charlie. The damage to Charlie had occurred in childbirth and had left Eleanor Milton a permanent invalid. There were household servants, of course, and there had been a series of male nurses for Charlie over the years.

Charlie had had no friends as a child, because the parents of other children drew back in reluctant horror. So the series of male nurses and his parents were the only human contacts Charlie had ever had until about a year before that last Saturday of the Bridgehampton Fair.

In the early days a high iron fence surrounding the ten acres adjacent to the Milton house had kept the child Charlie a prisoner. Now he could easily climb the fence, and no attempt was made to keep him from strolling around the rest of the property—with his male nurse always in attendence. A part of the property adjoined a grass-grown dirt road which was infrequently used. A logging road came down out of the woods to join the dirt road, and Charlie and his jailer would see the tall gray-haired man who used the logging road so often, driving a Jeep, with a setter dog sitting on the seat beside him and not infrequently accompanied by a small boy of about twelve.

One day as Charlie watched, the Jeep with its three passengers came to a stop beside Charlie. The male nurse moved in quickly.

"Nice day," the gray-haired man said.

Charlie smiled. The words, even those simple words, meant nothing to him, but the tone of voice apparently did. It was friendly. The pale blue eyes had a twinkle in them. The small boy was grinning.

Charlie reached uncertainly out toward the dog.

"No, Charlie," the male nurse said. But before he could draw Charlie's hand back, the setter dog gave it a warm slobbering lick.

Charlie made a curious gurgling sound of delight. The small boy kept smiling, but he looked strained. The dog and the gray-haired man didn't alter their expressions by a hair.

"He doesn't understand anything," the male nurse explained. "I'm Frank Hargrove. My job is looking out for him."

"He understands an attempt at friendship," the gray-haired man said, not taking his blue eyes off Charlie. His voice was cultivated, unexpected in the rough woodsman's clothes. He must have been Greek-god handsome as a young man. Now

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the tanned face had deep lines at each side of the firm straight mouth and the eyes were flanked by a network of crow's-feet. It was a face that suggested humor and compassion.

"I'm George Crowder," he said. "This is my nephew, Joey Trimble. And Timmy. Most people around town call me Uncle George. You're welcome to, Mr. Hargrove."

"You know about Charlie?" Hargrove asked.

Uncle George Crowder nodded. "Know about him, and Joey and Timmy and I have been talking about him. Decided the time had come for us to make an offer of friendship."

"He wouldn't understand," Hargrove said.

"We can try," Uncle George said. "We can keep saying hello. Just that might mean something to him."

So that's how Charlie Milton got his first friends at the age of 22. Almost every day George Crowder and Joey and Timmy would stop along the roadside to see Charlie, and every day Charlie would be waiting for them.

"He seems to want to come down here," Hargrove told Uncle George. "He never cared where I took him before."

They brought Charlie presents—the kind of presents you'd bring a child. They brought him a colored ball and a Teddy bear, and Joey picked flowers with him and tried to show him how to fish in a small pond on the property, and Timmy raced and ran with the big man-child.

One day Joey tried a sort of mock wrestling match with him. Suddenly Joey cried out. Charlie was enormously strong. And when Joey cried out it seemed to panic Charlie and his hold tightened on Joey until the boy screamed.

Uncle George moved very slowly, talking in a normal voice. Hargrove, his face pale, pulled a lead-weighted billy from his hip pocket and started toward Charlie, the weapon raised.

But the first to reach the boy and the child-man was Timmy the setter. His tail moved in a stiff wag and he growled. Charlie looked at him, puzzled, and his hold on Joey relaxed.

"Just take it easy, Joey," Uncle George said. "Act as if nothing happened." His hand closed on Hargrove's wrist.

The moment passed. Timmy gave Charlie's hand a reassuring lick and there was no more danger.

"Mr. Milton's terrified something will make him angry some day and he'll bust loose. God knows what he might do. That's why I carry this billy."

"Odd," Uncle George said. "The dog knew how to tell him. Too bad we don't know how."

That evening Robert Milton, tall, elegant, rigid, appeared at the door of the cabin up the logging road where George Crowder lived alone

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with Timmy the setter. Personal sorrow had given Robert Milton a rock-hard exterior.

"Hargrove told me what happened this afternoon," Milton said to Uncle George, after introducing himself. "I meant to come sooner, Mr. Crowder, to express my thanks and Mrs. Milton's for your kindnesses to Charlie."

"Been a pleasure," Uncle George said.

"You're not afraid after this afternoon?" Milton asked.

"It was nothing," Uncle George said. "Two kids wrestling. That kind of thing often gets out of hand."

Two large tears ran down Robert Milton's stony face. Uncle George looked away and rubbed the top of Timmy's sleek head.

"I think I should warn you," Milton said. "We've been told—by the best medical advice there is—that Charlie might some day run wild. Go berserk. If there are any signs of it we must institutionalize him at once. I think that would kill his mother."

"Don't worry about this afternoon," Uncle George said. "Charlie just doesn't realize his own strength. Timmy told him and that was that."

"Timmy?" Milton asked.

"Dog here," Uncle George said. "I sometimes think man would be better off if he didn't have a language. Then he'd just live by instinct and feelings and he'd probably be all right."

But on that August Saturday, the last day of the Bridgehampton Fair, Charlie Milton picked up his male nurse, Frank Hargrove, and threw him bodily through the side of a greenhouse on the Milton estate. A sliver of glass penetrated dangerously close to Hargrove's jugular vein, and he suffered other deep cuts plus a broken leg and a fractured wrist. The violence of the attack was almost impossible to imagine.

The sound of shattering glass brought Mr. Milton to the scene, but not soon enough to know what had set Charlie off or where he had gone.

Milton called the State Police. The thing he'd dreaded most in the world had happened. Charlie had turned monster, and God alone knew who else he might harm before he was restrained.

Hargrove was unconscious when Milton found him and wasn't able to make any sort of statement to the Troopers when they rushed to the hospital to talk to him. The sliver of glass in his neck required instant surgical attention, and there was a question about a concussion or even a possible skull fracture.

Charlie had never had any sort of problem with the male nurse. Robert Milton was at a complete loss to explain what had turned his tragic son against Hargrove.

The assumption was that Charlie had taken to the woods because no

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one had seen him walking along any of the roads—and he would have been noticed. But the State Troopers found no trail they could readily follow.

There were two men in Lakeview who were expert woodsmen. One of them was Sheriff Red Egan and the other was Uncle George Crowder who was said to be able to trail a chipmunk across a rock ledge. Red Egan was at the Fair and so was Uncle George who'd made an annual pilgrimage to Bridgehampton with his nephew Joey.

The Trooper Sergeant put in a phone call to the Fairgrounds and Sheriff Egan and Uncle George were paged over the loudspeaker system. The Troopers were anxious to get Uncle George on the scene, because Robert Milton had told them that it was just possible Uncle George might be able to control poor Charlie.

George Crowder was what people in Lakeview called "a character." He'd had a fine education, was graduated from law school at the top of his class, and had soon become State's Attorney for the county. People said he had a brilliant political career ahead of him. The Governor's mansion seemed to beckon, and from there, who could tell? The United States Senate?

But as State's Attorney, George Crowder once convicted a man of murder, and then, after the execution, the man had been proved innocent. George Crowder resigned his office and disappeared from Lakeview for a couple of years. People said he was drinking himself to death. But in the end he returned, built himself a little cabin in the woods, and lived there with his dog Timmy. His one great pleasure seemed to be in helping his sister's son, Joey, at the business of growing up. Uncle George was considered the best woodsman, the best man with a rifle, and the cagiest fisherman in the area.

On that Saturday no one doubted that if poor Charlie Milton could be found in the woods before dark, George Crowder was the man who could do it.

A general alarm was broadcast throughout the neighboring towns. It was feared that Charlie would appear somewhere and launch another attack on some helpless and innocent person.

By the time Uncle George and Joey and the Sheriff, who'd grown up with Gerrge Crowder and loved him like a brother, got back to Lakeview from the Fair, the town was in the grip of a kind of hysteria. Men stood on their front porches, armed with shotguns; mothers had hustled their children indoors to safety; Trooper cars patrolled the streets.

Robert Milton was a figure of grim despair when Uncle George and Joey and Red Egan arrived at the big Colonial house.

"I've tried to tell myself all these years, in spite of the doctor's warn-

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ings, that it would never happen," he said. "But poor Hargrove will be lucky if he pulls through, and God knows what else may happen."

"No statement from Hargrove?" Uncle George asked.

"Still unconscious."

"What about that weighted billy he always carried?" Uncle George asked.

"It was gripped in his hand when I found him," Milton said. "Evidently he managed to get it out of his pocket, but he didn't have time to use it. My fear, and Mrs. Milton's, is that someone will shoot Charlie on sight."

"Let's hope we find him before he runs into some trigger-happy jerk," Egan said.

"Is this the first time Charlie's ever been off this place," Uncle George asked, "without someone with him?"

Milton nodded.

"He must be scared half to death by now," Joey said.

"And fear could make him dangerous," the Sheriff said.

"It'll be dark in another half hour," Milton said. "Even if you can pick up his trail you won't be able to follow it for long."

"I've got a friend who can," Uncle George said. "My dog Timmy. Friend of Charlie's too."

Uncle George had been heard to say that there were three things he believed in beyond question: God, the Constitution of the United States, and his dog Timmy. Timmy went almost everywhere with Uncle George, but on the rare occasions when he couldn't—the officials of the Bridgehampton Fair would not have welcomed him—he was instructed by Uncle George to wait on the front steps of the cabin porch until Uncle George returned.

"And he'd stay there till hell froze over," Uncle George always said.

It was therefore a shock to Uncle George and Joey to find Timmy missing when they came to the cabin to get him. They called to him, without result, and then Uncle George used the "silent dog whistle" which is supposed to carry for a mile or more. If Timmy had strayed a little distance away he'd be bound to answer.

Joey felt betrayed. But Uncle George, his face a mask, was trying to find some signs in the grass around the cabin. He called sharply to Joey.

"Look here, boy!"

Just off the edge of the porch there was evidence of a struggle. They could see where Timmy's sharp nails had drawn furrows in the turf. There was the deep imprint of a very large man's shoe. Uncle George knelt and touched a stain on the grass.

"Blood!" he said.

Tears ran down Joey's cheeks.

"He hurt Timmy, Uncle George! Timmy would have let him come close because he was his friend, and Charlie hurt him." He didn't dare

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speak the word that was at his lips. Only death or mortal injury would have made it possible for anyone to have taken Timmy from his appointed place.

"Get the flashlight from inside the cabin," Uncle George said to the boy in a stony voice, "and my rifle."

The trail of the big feet became clear under the flashlight.

"He came up here," Uncle George said, his voice unrecognizable. "He fought with Timmy and then went back down toward the road. I think he was carrying Timmy because the prints going down are a little deeper. Let's go, boy—we may not have much time."

They followed the trail down to the main road. They stood there, directly across from the spot where they usually visited Charlie.

"Can't follow the trail on the road," Uncle George said. "Too hard-packed. You take the right-hand side, boy, and I'll take the left. He may have stepped onto the soft shoulder somewhere."

Uncle George walked, head down, rifle crooked under his arm, looking for a reappearance of the big foot. Joey walked on the other side of the road. Suddenly he shouted excitedly.

"Here it is, Uncle George! He went up here!"

They'd gone about a half mile and there was another little logging road heading up into the woods. Uncle George crossed quickly to where the boy stood. There were a clear set of big footprints going up the road; also some fresh tire marks.

"Come on!" Joey pleaded. "He went up here!"

Uncle George had the flashlight focused on the footprints. "Not the same man, Joey," he said reluctantly. "This one was wearing shoes with ribbed rubber soles. The one we're after was wearing leather-soled shoes with a heel cleat."

Across the way they could see lights in the windows of the Milton house.

"Let's find out what kind of shoes Charlie was wearing," Uncle George said. "We don't want to go off on a wild goose chase, boy."

They climbed the fence bordering the road and headed across the vast expanse of lawn toward the Milton house. A few yards from the road they came on the greenhouse. They could see the smashed section where Charlie had thrown Hargrove through the glass and left him to die.

"He must be awful strong," Joey said, "to throw a man clean through that wall."

"Giant-strong," Uncle George said.

An exhausted-looking Robert Milton answered their knock at the the door. A parked official car indicated that the Troopers had left someone in the house.

"They think he might come back of his own accord," Milton said.

"What kind of shoes was he wearing?" Uncle George asked.

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"Why—he usually wore white buckskins with rubber soles in the summertime," Milton said. "He had a couple of pairs. I could check."

"Please—and hurry," Uncle George said.

While they waited, another car swung into the driveway. It was Sheriff Egan.

"Timmy didn't pick up the trail?" he asked, as he joined them.

"He didn't because he couldn't," Uncle George said. "Someone injured him and took him away."

"Someone? You mean Charlie, of course."

"It had to be Charlie," Joey said, his face woebegone. "Timmy wouldn't have let anyone else that close—not close enough to hurt him!"

Milton rejoined them. "He was wearing the rubber-soled buckskins," he said. "Does that help? To know what shoes he was wearing?"

"I think he went up the logging road just across from here," Uncle George said. "The O'Connell property," he added to the Sheriff.

"Let's go," Red Egan said.

Uncle George and Joey climbed into the Sheriff's car and they started off for the logging road. Joey squirmed uneasily.

"If Charlie was wearing rubber-soled shoes, Uncle George, then he wasn't the one up at our cabin."

"It would seem that way," Uncle George said. "Step on it, Red. I'd hate to be too late."

"Too late for what?" Red Egan asked.

"To save a man's life," Uncle George said.

They'd driven a few hundred yards up the logging road when it appeared that Uncle George was not to have his wish. The headlights of Egan's car picked up the body of a man sprawled across the road.

The two men and the boy scrambled out to kneel beside the body.

"It's Toby Jackson," Egan said. "Family lives over by the box factory. He was probably one of the search party."

"He's still alive," Uncle George said. "But what a going-over!"

One arm lay crookedly away from the body as though it didn't belong there, and the man's jaw hung loose and crooked.

"Looks like someone worked him over with a sledge-hammer," Egan said. "I better get help or he isn't long for this veil of tears."

From some distance away the silence of the woods was shattered by what sounded like some large animal roaring with pain or rage. Then they heard a pounding noise.

Egan muttered under his breath. "Goshamighty, what's that?"

"Not far away—just over that rise of ground," Uncle George said. "There's a clearing just beyond, I remember."

The noises were repeated—the pounding and the angry animal-roaring.

The two men and the boy pressed

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on to the top of the rise. Uncle George kept playing his flashlight on the ground.

"Jackson came this way running," he said. "Staggering from side to side."

"Wonder he made it at all," Egan said.

As they came near the high ground they could see a glow of light from the other side. Red Egan's hands tightened on his rifle.

"Headlights of a car," he said. "It looks like Charlie might have some of the search party cornered."

"Play it easy, Red," Uncle George said sharply.

They reached the crest of the hill and then they could see what was going on in the clearing below. There was a large closed-in truck parked there and next to it a small pickup truck with what looked like a pile of tarpaulins stacked inside. The pickup's lights were on, focused on the other truck. And theatrically spotlighted like an actor on stage was Charlie Milton.

He was at the back doors of the larger truck, trying to tear the doors off their hinges. The angry roaring came from Charlie, and as they stood watching him, frozen for a few seconds, he beat on the doors with his fists, which explained the pounding noise.

"Charlie!" Uncle George shouted.

Charlie turned, staring wildly up into the darkness. His face was ghost-white, and a trickle of blood ran down one cheek.

In that moment came a muffled, desperate cry for help.

"There's someone in the truck!" the Sheriff said. "Come on!"

"Charlie!" Uncle George called out again, and aimed the beam of his flashlight at him.

The huge bareheaded man-child gave a cry that might have been pleasure or rage and then came bounding toward them. Instinctively Red Egan raised his gun to his shoulder.

"Put it down, Red," Uncle George said.

Then Charlie was on them. He grabbed Uncle George and began to drag him toward the larger truck. There was a terrible, helpless effort to say something, but the only sounds that Charlie could manage were meaningless. Red Egan saw tears streaming down Charlie's face.

Uncle George, trying not to fall, was half dragged, half carried to the back of the truck and there Charlie let go of him and again began to pound on the doors. His fists were swollen and bloodied.

"Charlie!" Uncle George said. He gestured to the man-child to stand back. "Take his hand, Joey."

Uncle George could have asked Joey to walk into the fiery furnace and Joey would have done so without question. The boy reached out and took Charlie's huge hand. Uncle George turned toward the truck.

"You inside there," he said. "It's all right now—we've got him under control. Open up."

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"You're sure?" a voice called from inside the truck.

"Positive."

They could hear the sliding of bolts and the left-hand rear door was pushed open. A man, streaked with sweat, his face the color of ashes, appeared in the opening.

"Thank God!" he said in a shaken voice. "I thought no one would ever come. That monster—"

And then he screamed, because Charlie had broken away from Joey and hurled himself at the man. The man jumped for safety and went rolling away into the bushes.

Charlie paid no attention to him. He was inside the truck, making strange, anxious noises.

"Get him!" Uncle George said in a grim voice.

Red Egan started for the truck.

"Not Charlie!" Uncle George said. "The other one!"

And then Charlie appeared in the open door. He was carrying something in his arms. At first Joey and the Sheriff couldn't make out what it was—something wrapped in a heavy net of some sort. But Uncle George reached up and Charlie put whatever it was in Uncle George's arms.

And then the thing in the net gave a whimpering sound and Joey jumped forward.

"Timmy!" he cried out.

"Easy, boy." Uncle George said gently. "I'll have him out of that in a jiffy." He began slashing carefully at the net with his pocketknife. Timmy's black nose appeared and his tongue licked Uncle George's gnarled hand.

Suddenly from inside the truck a dog barked, and instantly there was a chorus of barks and yelps.

Egan had come back with the other man. He had the man's arms twisted behind his back.

Timmy was now free of the entangling net and he greeted Uncle George and Joey eagerly; then he turned, stood up on his hind legs, and rested his paws on Charlie Milton's shoulders. He licked the salt tears on Charlie's face, and the man-child put his arms around the dog and a heartbreaking, cooing sound came from his throat.

There were more than a dozen dogs in the larger truck. It had been a perfect day for Toby Jackson and his partner-in-crime to work in the town of Lakeview. Most of the people were at the Fair.

"There's a good price on dogs for laboratory experiments—damn them," Uncle George told Robert Milton later. "There've been warnings in national magazines, but nobody ever thinks the bad things will happen to them. Jackson had lined up the town in advance and he and his friend were picking up a load of dogs—all of them owned and loved by local residents. They parked the bigger truck in the woods and Jackson picked up the dogs, one or two at a time, and brought them there to be shut up in the truck.

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He caught 'em in nets—didn't even bother to set them free."

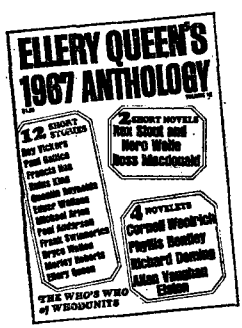
"And Charlie—?" Milton asked.

"Charlie must have seen Jackson come down from my cabin with Timmy in the net," Uncle George said. He reached down and rubbed the setter's white head which was pressed against his knee. "He probably tried in his way to explain to Hargrove, and when Hargrove made a move to stop him from going after the truck—when he pulled out his billy—Charlie did the only thing his poor brain could think of. He picked up Hargrove and simply threw him.

"By then Jackson was out of sight, and Charlie must have spent hours looking for the two men in the woods. When he finally found them he tried to get at Timmy in the truck. One man got to safety, inside the truck. Jackson was beaten up but when he ran Charlie didn't follow him—or Jackson would be dead now. All Charlie wanted was to save Timmy."

"His friend," Milton said unsteadily.

"Thank God for him," Uncle George said. "Timmy and I—and Joey—well, there isn't anything we won't do for your son, Mr. Milton. I'd say he's made a lot of friends in Lakeview today."



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARGERY ALLINGHAM**

TITLE: ***Bubble Bath No. 3***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Ronald Torbay was very careful to choose the right type of wife—he owed much of his success to this precaution. Ronald's success? Well, it might be called a series of "Honeymoon Mishaps" . . .*

AT FIVE O'CLOCK ON A SEPTEMBER afternoon Ronald Fredrick Torbay was making preparations for his third murder. He was being wary because he was well aware of the dangers of carelessness.

He knew, 'way back before his first marriage, that a career of homicide got more chancy as one went on. Also, he realized, success was liable to go to a man's head.

For an instant he paused and regarded himself thoughtfully in the shaving glass of the bathroom in the new cottage he had hired so recently.

The face which looked back at him was thin, middle-aged, and pallid. Sparse dark hair receded from its high narrow forehead and the eyes were blue and prominent. Only the mouth was really unusual. That narrow slit, quite straight, was almost lipless and, unconsciously, he persuaded it to relax into a half smile. Even Ronald Torbay did not like his own mouth.

A sound in the kitchen below disturbed him and he straightened up hastily. It might be Edyth coming up to take her long discussed bubble bath before he had prepared it for her, and that would never do.

He waited, holding his breath, but it was all right; she was going out of the back door. He looked out the window to see her disappearing round the side of the house into the

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small square yard which was so exactly like all the other square yards in the long suburban street. He knew she was going to hang some linen on the line to air, and although the maneuver gave him the time he needed, still it irritated him.

Of the three homely, middle-aged women whom he had persuaded to marry him and then to will him their modest possessions, Edyth was proving easily the most annoying. In their six weeks of marriage he had told her a dozen times not to spend so much time in the yard. He hated her being out of doors alone. She was shy and reserved, but now that new people had moved in next door there was always the danger of some over-friendly woman starting up an acquaintance with her, and that was the last thing to be tolerated at this juncture.

Each of his former wives had been shy. He had been very careful to choose the right type and felt he owed much of his success to it. Mary, the first of them, had met her fatal "accident" almost unnoticed in the bungalow of a housing development very like the present one he had chosen, but in the north instead of the south of England.

At the time it had been a growing place, the Coroner had been hurried, the police sympathetic but busy, and the neighbors scarcely curious—except that one of them, a junior reporter on a local paper whose story was picked up by the wire services, had written a flowery paragraph about the nearness of tragedy in the midst of joy, published a wedding-day snapshot, and had titled the article with typical northern understatement, *Honeymoon Mishap.*

Dorothy's brief excursion into his life and abrupt exit from it had given him a little more bother. She had deceived him when she told him she was quite alone in the world. An interfering brother had turned up after the funeral to ask awkward questions about her small fortune. He might have been a nuisance if Ronald had not been very firm with him. There had been a brief court case duly recorded in a small item in newsprint. However, Ronald had won his case handsomely, and the insurance company had paid up without a murmur.

All that was four years ago. Now, with a new name and a newly invented background, he felt remarkably safe.

From the moment he had first seen Edyth, sitting alone at a little table under the window in a seaside hotel dining room, he had known that she was to be his next subject. He always thought of his wives as "subjects."

Edyth had sat there looking stiff and neat and a trifle severe, but there had been a secret timidity in her face, an unsatisfied, half-frightened expression in her nearsighted

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eyes. She was also wearing a genuine diamond brooch.

He had spoken to her that evening, had weathered the initial snub, and finally got her to talk. After that the acquaintance had progressed just as he had expected. His methods were old-fashioned and heavily romantic, and within a week she was hopelessly infatuated.

From Ronald's point of view her history was ideal. She had taught in a girls' boarding school during her twenties before being summoned home to look after a demanding father, whose long illness had monopolized her life; now at forty-three she was alone, comparatively well off, and as much at sea as a ship without a rudder.

Ronald was careful not to let her toes touch the ground. He devoted his entire attention to her, and in exactly five weeks he married her at the registry office of the town where they were both strangers. The same afternoon they each made a will in the other's favor and moved into the villa which he had been able to hire cheaply because the holiday season was at an end.

Two things signed her death warrant earlier than had been Ronald's original intention. One was her obstinate reticence over her monetary affairs and the other was her embarrassing interest in his job.

Ronald had told her that he was a junior partner in a firm of cosmetic manufacturers who were giving him a very generous leave of absence. Edyth accepted the statement without question, but almost at once she had begun to plan a visit to the office and the factory and said she must buy some new clothes so as not to "disgrace" him. At the same time she kept all her business papers locked in an old writing case and steadfastly refused to discuss them, however cautiously he raised the subject. Ronald had given up feeling angry with her and had decided to act.

He turned from the window and began to run the bath.

The bathroom was the one room they had repainted. Ronald had done it himself and had put up the little shelf over the bath to hold a small electric heater of the old-fashioned type. He switched it on now and stood looking at it until the two bars of glowing warmth appeared. Then he went out onto the landing, leaving the heater alight.

The fuse box which controlled all the electricity in the house was concealed in the bottom of the linen cupboard at the head of the stairs. Ronald opened the door carefully and, using his handkerchief so that his fingerprints should leave no trace, pulled the main switch.

Back in the bathroom the heater's glow died away; the bars were almost black again by the time he returned. He eyed the heater approvingly and then, still using the handkerchief, he lowered it carefully into the water. It lay close to the foot of the tub where it took

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up practically no room at all. The white cord of the heater ran up over the porcelain side of the bath, along the baseboard, under the door, and into a wall socket just outside on the landing.

When he had first installed the heater, Edyth had demurred at this somewhat slipshod arrangement. But he had explained that the local Council was stupid and fussy about fitting wall sockets in bathrooms since water was said to be a conductor, and she had agreed to let him run the cord under the linoleum.

At the moment the heater was perfectly visible in the bath. It certainly looked as if it had fallen into its odd position accidentally, but no one in his senses could have stepped into the water without seeing it. Ronald paused, his ugly mouth narrower than ever. The beautiful simplicity of the main plan, so swiftly fatal and, above all, so safe as far as he was concerned, gave him a thrill of pleasure—as it always did.

He turned off the faucet and waited, listening. Edyth was coming back. He could hear her moving something on the concrete outside the back door below and he took a paper sachet from his jacket pocket.

He was reading the directions on the back of it when a slight sound made him turn his head, and he saw, to his horror, the woman herself not five feet away. Her neat head had appeared suddenly just above the flat roof of the scullery, outside the bathroom window. She was clearing the dead leaves from the gutters and must, he guessed, be standing on a stepladder.

It was typical of the man that he did not panic. Still holding the sachet lightly, he stepped between her and the bath and spoke mildly.

"What on earth are you doing there, darling?"

Edyth started so violently that she almost fell off the ladder. "Oh, how you startled me! I thought I'd just do this little job before I came up to change. If it rains, the gutter floods all over the back step.

"Very thoughtful of you, my dear." He spoke with that slightly acid amusement with which he had found he could best destroy her slender vein of self-assurance. "But not terribly clever when you knew I'd come up to prepare your beauty bath for you. Or was it?"

The slight intonation on the word "beauty" was not lost on her. He saw her swallow.

"Perhaps it wasn't," she said without looking at him. "It's very good of you to take all this trouble, Ronald."

"Not at all," he said with just the right amount of masculine, offhand insensitivity. "I'm taking you out tonight and I want you to look as nice as possible. Hurry up, there's a good girl. The foam doesn't last indefinitely, and like all very high-class beauty treatments, it's expensive. Undress in the bedroom, put on your gown, and come along."

"Very well, dear." She began to

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descend while he turned and shook the contents of the sachet into the water. The crystals, smelling strongly of roses, floated on the tide and then when he turned the water on hard, they began to dissolve into thousands of iridescent bubbles. The bubbles grew into a fragrant feathery mass which obscured the bottom of the bath and overflowed the porcelain sides of the tub.

It was perfect.

He opened the door to call to her and just then she appeared. She came shrinking in, her blue dressing gown strained round her thin body, her hair thrust into an unbecoming bathing cap.

"Oh, Ronald!" she said staring at the display. "Won't it make an awful mess? Goodness! All over the floor!"

Her hesitation infuriated him.

"That won't matter," he said savagely. "You get in while the foam is still there. Hurry. Meanwhile I'll go and change, myself. Get in, and lie down. It'll take the sallowness out of your skin."

He went out and paused, listening. She locked the door as he had known she would. The habits of a lifetime do not change with marriage. He heard the bolt slide home and forced himself to walk slowly.

He gave her sixty seconds—thirty to take off her things and thirty to hesitate on the brink of the rosy mass.

"How is it?" he shouted from the linen cupboard.

She did not answer at once and the sweat broke out on his forehead. Then he heard her.

"I don't know yet. I'm only just in. It smells lovely."

He did not wait for the final word; his hand wrapped in his handkerchief had found the main switch.

"One, two . . . *three*," he said with horrible prosaicness—and pulled.

From the wall socket behind him there was a single spluttering flare as the fuse went, and then silence.

All round Ronald it was so quiet that he could hear the pulses in his own body, and he could hear no sound at all from the bathroom.

After a while he crept back along the passage and tapped at the door.

"Edyth? Are you there? Edith?"

There was no response, no sound.

"Edyth?" he said again.

The silence was complete, and after a long minute he straightened his back and let out a deep sighing breath of relief.

Almost at once he was keyed up again in preparation for the second phase. As he well knew, this next was the tricky period. The discovery of the body must be made, but not too soon. He had made that mistake after Dorothy's "accident" and had actually been asked by the local police Inspector why he had become alarmed so soon; but he had kept his head that time, and the dangerous moment had passed.

This time he had decided to wait half an hour before he began to

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hammer loudly on the door, then to shout for a neighbor, and finally to force the lock. He had planned to stroll out to buy an evening paper, shouting his intention to do so to Edyth from the front step for any passer-by to hear; but as he walked back along the landing he knew there was something else he must do first.

Edyth's leather writing case in which she kept all her private papers was in the bottom of her hatbox. She had really believed he had not known of its existence, he reflected bitterly.

He went softly into the bedroom and opened the wardrobe door. The case was exactly where he had last seen it, plump and promising, and his hands closed over it gratefully. There were bundles of savings certificates, one or two thick envelopes whose red seals suggested the offices of lawyers, and, on top, ready for the taking, one of those familiar gray books which the Post Office issues to its savings-bank clients.

He opened it with shaking fingers and fluttered through the pages. The sum made him whistle. £7250! Then a drop as she had drawn out £50 for her trousseau.

£7200. He thought that was the final entry but on turning the page saw that there was one more recorded transaction. It was less than a week old. He remembered the book coming back through the mail and how clever she had thought she had been smuggling it in.

He glanced at the written words and figures idly at first, but then, as his heart jolted in sudden panic, stared at them, his eyes prominent and glazed.

She had taken almost all of it out. There it was in black and white: *September 4th: Withdrawal seven thousand one hundred and ninety-eight pounds.*

His first thought was that the money must still be there, in hundred-pound notes perhaps, in one of the envelopes. He tore through them hastily, forgetting all caution in his anxiety. Papers, letters, certificates fell on the floor in confusion.

The envelope, addressed to himself, pulled him up short. It was new and freshly blotted, the name inscribed in Edyth's own unexpectedly firm hand—*Ronald Torbay, Esquire.*

He wrenched it open and stared at the single sheet of bond paper within. The date, he noted in horrified amazement, was only two days old.

Dear Ronald:

If you ever get this I am afraid it will prove a dreadful shock to you. For a long time I have been hoping that it might not be necessary to write it, but now your behavior has forced me to face some very unpleasant possibilities.

I am afraid, Ronald, that in some ways you are very old-fashioned. Has it not occurred to you that any homely, middle-aged woman who has been swept into a hasty marriage

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to a stranger must, unless she is a perfect idiot, be just a little suson the subject of *baths?*

You must know that I am a dedicated newspaper reader, and after reading about two women who had met with fatal accidents in bubble baths soon after their marriages, I rather began to wonder.

Frankly, I did not want to suspect you because for a long time I thought I was in love with you; but when you persuaded me to make my will on our wedding day, I could not help wondering. And then as soon as you started fussing about the bathroom in this house, I thought I had better do something about it rather quickly. I am old-fashioned, too, Ronald, so I went to the police.

Have you noticed that the people who have moved into the house next door have never tried to speak to you? We thought it best that I should merely talk to the woman over the garden wall, and it is she who looked up the newspaper items I told her about. She even went a little further and found some cuttings from local provincial newspapers, each of which contained a press snapshot of the husband taken at the funeral.

They are not very clear, but even so, as soon as I saw them I realized it was my duty to agree to the course suggested to me by the Inspector. He told me that he had been looking for a man answering that description for over three years, ever since the two photographs were brought to his notice by your poor second wife's brother.

What I am trying to say is this: if you should ever lose me, Ronald—out of the bathroom, I mean—you will find that I have gone out over the roof and am sitting in my dressing gown in the kitchen next door. I was a fool to marry you, but not quite such a fool as you assumed. Women may be silly but they are not so stupid as they used to be. We are picking up the idea, Ronald.

Yours,

Edyth

P.S. On reading this I see that in my nervousness I have forgotten to say that the new people next door are not a married couple but Inspector Batsford of the C.I.D. and his assistant, Policewoman Richards. They assure me that there cannot be sufficient evidence to convict if you are not permitted to attempt the crime again. That is why I am forcing myself to be brave and play my part, for I am very sorry for those other poor wives of yours, Ronald. They must have found you as fascinating as I did.

With his slit mouth twisted into an abominable O, Ronald Torbay raised haggard eyes from the letter.

The house was quiet, and even the whine of the mower next door had ceased. In the hush he heard a sudden clatter as the back door burst open and heavy footsteps raced through the hall, up the stairs toward him.

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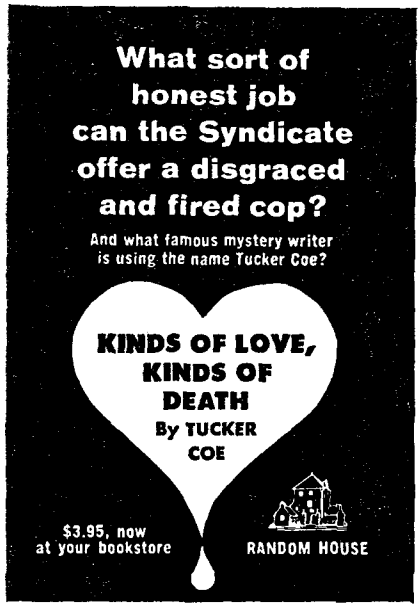
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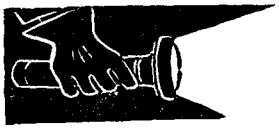

BEST MYSTERIES OF 1966

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

A reviewer's impressionistic picture of crime publishing in 1966 is that it largely consisted of fact-crime, black humor, anthologies, spy novels, gothicas, and books about Ian Fleming.

The year did have, of course, its due proportion of good, and even excellent novels in the main stream of suspense fiction; but let us look first at these other elements—especially the astonishing prominence of fact-crime, which may at last be attaining its true place as (to my mind) one of the most significant and illuminating of literary forms.

There were two major bestsellers (and good books) about private murder:

IN COLD BLOOD, *by Truman Capote* (Random, $5.95)
THE BOSTON STRANGLER, *by Gerold Frank* (New American Library, $5.95)

and two phenomenal reports of current trials by Paul Holmes, which appeared in print almost before the jury could reach their homes:

THE CANDY MURDER CASE (Bantam SZ3307, 75¢)
RETRIAL: MURDER AND DR. SAM SHEPPARD (Bantam SZ3472, 75¢)

plus an epidemic of books questioning the Warren Commission report on the murder of John F. Kennedy (which may be the most significant single factor in awakening today's reader to the importance of factual writing about murder), of which the most responsible—and deeply disturbing—were

INQUEST, *by Edward Jay Epstein* (Viking, $5.00; Bantam NZ3419, 95¢)
RUSH TO JUDGMENT, *by Mark Lane* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $5.95)

Less publicized and promoted than the six above, but also remarkable, is

THE LAST TWO TO HANG, *by Elwyn Jones* (Stein & Day, $4.95)

And the last word on fact-crime, for new readers and old, is

A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF CRIME, *by Julian Symons* (Crown, $10)

Books of black humor (or the mystery of the absurd, or whatever you choose to call it) were not frequent; but they left a powerful aftertaste. If you want to be in on the early days of what may well become a dominant new form, do not miss.

A QUEER KIND OF DEATH, *by George Baxt* (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)
GASCOYNE, *by Stanley Crawford* (Putnam's, $4.95)
THE CRIMSON MADNESS OF LITTLE DOOM, *by Mark McShane* (Crime Club, $3.50)

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Anthologies were, as usual, led by those from EQMM:

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY: 1966 MID-YEAR EDITION (Davis, $1.25)
ELLERY QUEEN'S CRIME CAROUSEL (New American Library, $5.50)
ELLERY QUEEN'S 1967 ANTHOLOGY (Davis, $1.25)

but there were more non-Queen anthologies than usual, and some were fine:

MY FAVORITE MYSTERY STORIES, *by Maureen Daly* (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)
13 WAYS TO DISPOSE OF A BODY, *by Basil Davenport* (Dodd, Mead, $4)
THE PLAYBOY BOOK OF CRIME AND SUSPENSE (Playboy, $5.95)

Among single-author collections, don't overlook:

MYSTERY AND MORE MYSTERY, *by Robert Arthur* (Random, $2.95)
THE INCREDIBLE SCHLOCK HOMES, *by Robert L. Fish* (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)
END OF THE TIGER, *by John D. MacDonald* (Gold Medal d1690, 50¢)

Of the formication of spy novels there was no end, and gothicas were almost equally prevalent. Almost hidden in all this *Dreck* were a number of good books, including one splendid serious spy novel, a gorgeous spy comedy and two blithe and bonny romances:

THE NIGHT IS A TIME FOR LISTENING, *by Elliot West* (Random, $4.95)
THE SPY IN THE OINTMENT, *by Donald E. Westlake* (Random, $3.95)
IN A GLASS DARKLY, *by Janet Caird* (Morrow, $3.95)
HIGHLAND MASQUERADE, *by Mary Elgin* (Mill-Morrow, $3.95)

Of the many books about Fleming, the permanent library item is

THE LIFE OF IAN FLEMING, *by John Pearson* (McGraw-Hill, $6.95)

Best novel of 1966 in the straight suspense form is a toss-up:

ODDS AGAINST, *by Dick Francis* (Harper & Row, $4.95)
THE KING OF THE RAINY COUNTRY, *by Nicolas Freeling* (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Other distinguished novels, all strongly recommended:

THE HANDS OF INNOCENCE, *by Jeffrey Ashford* (Walker, $3.50)
AT BERTRAM'S HOTEL, *by Agatha Christie* (Dodd, Mead, $4.50)
HOUSE ON GREENAPPLE ROAD, *by Harold R. Daniels* (Random, $3.95)
THE WIDOWMAKER, *by M. Fagyas* (Crime Club, $3.95)
THE CRACK IN THE TEACUP, *by Michael Gilbert* (Harper & Row, $4.50)
BLIND SPOT, *by Joseph Harrington* (Lippincott, $3.95)
DEATH OF A FAT GOD, *by H. R. F. Keating* (Dutton, $3.95)
SATURDAY THE RABBI WENT HUNGRY, *by Harry Kemelman* (Crown, $3.95)
THE PEDESTAL, *by George Lanning* (Harper & Row, $4.50)
DEATH SHALL OVERCOME, *by Emma Lathen* (Macmillan, $3.95)
BLACK MONEY, *by Ross Macdonald* (Knopf, $3.95)
KILLER DOLPHIN, *by Ngaio Marsh* (Little, Brown, $4.95)
SUNDAY; THE LITTLE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL, *by Georges Simenon* (Harcourt, Brace & World, $4.95)

*published for teenagers, but well worth adult attention

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It is only fair to warn you that this is not the usual kind of story you find in EQMM—not at all EQMM's "glass of champagne." True, this story concerns crime (and by implication at least, detection); but the crime is not one you're likely to think of even if you make a complete catalog of all the crime stories you've ever read. So you've been warned. . . .

It is only fair to say that this is a most unusual story to appear in any *magazine (we still can't help wondering how it came our way). It is an intoxicating tale, allusive, elusive, sybaritic, and lushly detailed—a tale to delight the taste of a voluptuary . . . Try to resist it—if you can!*

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE OF CHARLES HOMER

by FRANK SISK

THE BRONZE PLAQUE GLINTED like gold in the noonday sun. Recessed in the high wall of red brick, it was large enough to be read 20 feet away. Sitting at the wheel of my shabby two-door sedan, I read it with an uneasy sense of wonder. I even tried the sibilants aloud: "Surcease Isle."

The entrance was guarded by an iron gate wrought into scrolls and fleurs-de-lis that formed a black garland around two rampant white lions. Beyond the gate a concrete road glistened as if bleached between borders of rich green grass. Heroic formality —this was the general aspect of Surcease Isle. For a moment I was almost afraid to honk my horn, but only for a moment.

The single intrepid summons immediately produced the gatekeeper. He could have been hiding behind the rampart to which the gate was hinged. He was a huge man with a curly black beard; at his heels capered a small Scottish terrier.

"I'm here to see Miss Goodis," I said.

"Das Geschaft, vat iss?" said the gatekeeper in the burliest gutturals I've ever heard.

"A luncheon appointment is das Geschaft," I replied civilly. "I'm a lawyer—Charles Homer."

"Das Mittagessen, ja. Das Tor I open now up, Herr Homer." And he began to fit into the heavy padlock a key at least eight inches long. The little terrier barked with delight. "Be shtillen, Harold," the gatekeeper growled; and the terrier, lowering its muzzle as if understanding the pain of rebuff, skulked a pace backward.

Finally the outsize key did its

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work and chains rattled free, and in another moment the enormous gate swung slowly inward to the right.

I shifted the car into first and moved cautiously ahead, offering a half salute to the keeper and a winking tch-tch to the downcast Harold. Then my attention was wholly occupied by the enchanting vista that spread before me.

The main house, reputedly constructed of yellow Sienna marble, crouched on a terraced eminence half a mile up the gleaming road amid a sheltering grove of Babylonian willows. Here and there the façade shone like butter through the pale-green lace of leaves; and the roof, rising above the pendulous branches, displayed its red tiles to the blue sky like a banked fire.

For years I had been hearing of this place. Now seeing it for the first time it was as though each item of interest had been foretold in my most fanciful dreams.

There were the fabled water lilies, big as dinner plates, floating in the artificial pond beside reflections of the pink roses which climbed round four fluted pilasters. Here a swan and luscious Leda became one as a bronze fountain whose silvery spray eternally caressed the stone breasts of naked dryads. A grotto of myrtle and bittersweet parted briefly on my approach to disclose a piping Pan clothed only in a hand-held bunch of grapes.

Everything about the place was incredibly rich and yet expected. Twice at a distance I sighted deer browsing on carpets of purple clover, and once a big-horned goat with whiskers the color of cornsilk peered at me (wistfully, it seemed) from a break in a green hedge. I'm in another world, I thought, where reality is half hallucination.

But truth compels me to say that Surcease Isle was not really out of this world and it was not an island at all. According to the deed on file in the town clerk's office, it was 76 acres of gently rolling pasture and woodland near the southern tip of one of the Finger Lakes.

It was known to the natives as the Goodis Estate. They usually thought of it in connection with Andrew Goodis, although at the time of this visit he had been dead at least ten years and his daughter Millicent was as fully and forcefully in residence as he had ever been. It was she, in fact, who named it Surcease Isle on succeeding, as the old man's only child, to the Goodis millions.

The natives regarded father and daughter as two of a kind, a most uncommon kind, and kept a respectful distance.

Andrew Goodis had been a steel baron when such Gothic nomenclature was significantly current. His withdrawal from the hard realm of business, he used to say, was ordained the day he saw an up-and-coming young steel executive drinking cocktails in the Detroit Athletic Club with a union leader. There-

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after the old man had devoted himself somewhat quixotically to blooded horses, skittish blonde women, thoroughbred hunting dogs, and his beloved daughter—allegedly in that order. Unlike Millicent, he had spent more time abroad than at home. He is reported to have once said, apparently without tongue in cheek, that he found Paris infinitely more entertaining than Pittsburgh. He died at his grouse-shooting lodge in Scotland.

Taking over the reins and leashes, Millicent at 25 wasted no time following in her father's wide-ranging footsteps as closely as the difference in sex would permit. She liked blond men but she was not averse to brunets either. She required brawn, not brains.

Sometimes her notoriously transitory interest in a certain man lasted long enough to result in marriage. The count now stood at four husbands, perhaps five. This ambiguity revolved around doubt in many quarters as to whether her liaison with Burton Dray had ever been sanctified or notarized.

Dray, a second-string linebacker for the Giants, had left his post six months earlier with the publicized intention of becoming, as the sports writers put it, the fifth Mr. Goodis.

His red foreign sports car had been observed one evening to enter the gateway of Surcease Isle. Two evenings later other anonymous observers saw the same rakish car issue from the walls with Millicent and Dray in the front buckets and a prizewinning Irish setter sitting aloof in the back.

Within a week spectators at a gymkhana in Pinehurst noted the couple attending; and within two more days they (or at least Millicent) were reported to have shifted to active participation at field trials for pointers and setters in Augusta.

A month passed then before Millicent, alone, was seen and interviewed by reporters at Kennedy International a few minutes before boarding a plane Zurich-bound.

Where was her supposed spouse?

Obviously not present, admitted Millicent grandly. After all, many arrangements fall unhappily short of expectations.

Not much aghast, the scandalmongers desired to know if a divorce were imminent.

Millicent merely acknowledged that ties had been severed, most amicably on both sides, which obtuseness disposed one newshawk to inquire if a marriage had actually taken place. And if so, where—among the Carolina jumpers or the Georgia scenters?

Millicent was said to have smiled mysteriously at this insolence. "You would not have me compromise myself," she murmured, then vanished into Swissair.

Apparently Burton Dray had also vanished but in another direction. At any rate, on the day of my visit to Surcease Isle he was still absent from his accustomed haunts.

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I hoped his case was not a precursor of the matter that was bringing me here.

It was exactly 12:15 when I parked the jalopy under the friezed portico and, attaché case in hand, mounted the eight marble steps which led to the entrance door—an impressive slab of black mahogany into which was carved a nude archer (Heracles, as I learned later) drawing a powerful bow whose arrow was aimed in the general direction of an ivory doorbell button. I gave the button a decisive push and half turned to view the Corinthian columns that supported the portico. It didn't really surprise me to see a mule leaning against one as if preparing to scratch the side of his belly.

The only thing about Surcease Isle that kept me continually astonished was the fact that it was only about 20 miles from Ithaca, New York, where at this moment the mundane citizenry were engaged in the production of shotguns, salt, cement, men's shirts, and ladies' underwear. And where at this moment the part-time stenographer in my cramped law office was taking advantage of my absence by phoning her Cornell University bedmate to discuss his major, which was purebred sheep in general and Dorset rams in particular.

As I stood there exchanging speculative glances with the itchy mule, I suddenly felt a void nearby and again with a half turn, perceived that the heavy door had been opened wide by a man as black as itself.

"Monsieur Sharl Omay, is it not?" he asked in a voice as rich as the red velvet jacket and pantaloons that clothed his lank frame.

"It never sounded better," I said.

"The mademoiselle is expectant of you, monsieur. If you please to follow me."

So it was still mademoiselle despite four or five husbands, I thought as I followed the plush majordomo's back into a large hall. The ceiling arched at least 30 feet above my head and was ornamented with arabesques of fruit and foliage inhabited by repetitions of the same unicorn and phoenix. Mademoiselle and pére liked it gaudy, I mused, passing a Gobelin tapestry. The letter G (for *Goodis, obviously*) recurred as a cartouche on such things as lamp standards, cabinets, and door panels.

At a door that was open the majordomo stepped aside and bowed me into a room abloom with splashes of red, green, and gold. "Attend here comfortably, monsieur," he said. "A moment will transpire before the mademoiselle arrives."

It was hardly a room to feel at home in. The decor was too dazzling. The mantelpiece alone, constructed of a peach-colored marble, was worth an hour's rapt study. A mask of Dionysius dominated its center with ormolu garlands streaming from either side of his head. Above was a two-paneled mirror

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framed in gold which served as a foundation for a carving of Hades seizing a voluptuous Persephone while a band of satyrs looked on from the sanctuary of a wood.

"Mister Charles Homer." The voice, a vibrant contralto, might have issued from the Theban glade above the mantelpiece. "But may I call you Charles?"

Slowly turning, I beheld Millicent Goodis in the flesh. And I use the term advisedly, for flesh consummate, flesh alive and pulsing, flesh perfected in lithe yet lush harmonies—this was the essence of impact at first sight.

She was 35 or so, but the years had brought her to an ideal maturity —not of ripeness but of still ripening. She wore her glistening black hair in a severe style which enhanced the luminous quality of her brown eyes and the flawless white delicacy of her face. She was dressed in a white silk blouse that plunged and rose and black satin trousers that clung tenderly tight to each exquisite curve from waist to ankle.

Yea, Millicent Goodis was every inch a magnificent mammal.

I might have gaped at her interminably like a transfixed bumpkin if something directly to her right, something quite enormous and of another species, had not beckoned the corner of my eye for attention. Even so it required a profound effort of will to shift my line of vision from beauty to the beast. And beast it was—a canine type of brindle hue that stood taller than any of its kind in my acquaintance and must have weighed close to 200 pounds without the collar, a huge leathern device with cruel iron brads.

"May I ask once more," said Millicent Goodis in that dusky voice, "may I call you Charles, Mister Homer?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, of course. And what do you call that?"

She lay a slender-fingered hand on the animal's great skull and it looked up at her worshipfully. "This is Michael, a rather recent acquisition. Isn't he superb?"

"Of his kind, yes. And just what kind is he?"

"He's an Irish wolfhound, aren't you, Michael?"

Michael appeared to nod assent.

"Gentle and intelligent, looks like," I said fatuously. "Big as he is."

"Gentle indeed," said Millicent Goodis with a faint smile, "but not too intelligent. I don't believe the lower orders should be too intelligent, do you, Charles?"

"I haven't ever prepared a brief on the subject."

"A brief? Oh, yes, that's a legal term, isn't it? And of course you're a lawyer, Charles. I'd forgotten for the moment. Most lawyers I meet run so grossly to age and adipose tissue that I find it difficult to associate a young and attractive man with the profession."

Needless to say the flattery dazzled me, but before I could expose

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my susceptibility with some stammering foolishness, the black majordomo rolled a service cart into the room and headed toward a set of French doors.

"It's such a lovely day," said Millicent Goodis, "that I felt we should take lunch on the terrace. You do approve, don't you, Charles?"

"Utterly," I said.

Closely squired by the hound, she approached me and slipped her arm in mine. Her delicious propinquity, combined with a subtly rapacious perfume, sent an enervating tingle in radial formation from the solar plexus to all parts of my body. I felt as though I had been suddenly deprived of the simplest volition and given in its place a euphoric desire to bask forever in her lovely presence. Happy slaves must have felt this way, and animals well cared for.

I accompanied her to the sun-filled terrace with no less devotion than Michael.

"And what have you provided for us, Anatole?" she asked, addressing the majordomo. "Champagne?"

"Mais oui, mademoiselle." He held aloft a magnum swathed in spotless white and sweating cold beads of moisture. "A Veuve Clicquot of a very good year." He deftly twisted the restraining wire and released the cork with a hollow pop. "Permit me," he said, pouring a glass half full and holding it out to Millicent Goodis.

She drank it and handed the glass back to Anatole with a commendatory smile. He filled it to the brim this time and then did the same for me.

"A glass of champagne is the best way to begin a friendship," said my hostess by way of toast, "and the only way to end one."

"If end it must," I added.

"But everything must end, Charles. Naturally."

"May I call you Millicent?"

"Do. And do be seated."

The table was set for color photography. Smoked salmon with the tone and texture of pink rose petals lay luxuriantly over green hillocks of lettuce; black olives nestled gleaming against stalks of pale celery hearts; a white cheese redolently mottled with age sat against a double stack of wheaten crackers; black caviar shimmered in one silver dish, a carmined bisque of lobster in another.

The presence of my attaché case seemed awkward, yet as I placed it out of sight beside my chair it reminded me that I had come here for business, not for pleasure.

"Millicent," I began, savoring her name in spite of myself like a magic incantation, "Millicent, Millicent."

"Yes, Charles?"

"Millicent, this—this champagne is delectable."

"It rather suits any occasion, doesn't it?"

"I'm beginning to think so."

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"And you're thinking something else too, aren't you?"

"I am? Well, perhaps so." I looked across the table into the unknown depths of her lustrous eyes and was all but lost to reason.

"I believe I can even read your mind, Charles."

"I hope not." I finished the champagne thirstily. "Or rather, I hope so."

"You are thinking how much nicer it would be to lavish this interval on pleasant inconsequentialities than to discuss the matter which brought you here."

"You are endowed with uncanny insight as well as with enchanting beauty," I said with uncommon felicity.

She gave me a curious look of approval and then turned to the majordomo, who had practically dematerialized himself against the backdrop of a tall boxed plant that dripped a profusion of scarlet flowers. "Anatole, refill our glasses, please."

He detached his black-and-red image from the floral camouflage and complied in dignified silence with the mademoiselle's request.

"You may withdraw for the nonce," Millicent said, and Anatole backed off and disappeared through the French doors.

"You're accustomed to good service, I see," I said.

She raised a quizzical eyebrow. "It's a birthright, Charles. I expect it."

"I see."

"But I don't always get it." She raised her glass and looked amusedly at me over the sparkling brim. "Right now, for instance, I would give much to obtain a moment's beguilement, but I realize I must first help you to dispose of a most urgent problem."

"Urgent?" I asked.

"That was the word you used on the phone yesterday."

"That's right." I raised my glass. "Let's drink to a speedy solution."

"By all means."

We drained our glasses simultaneously.

"Now," I said, "I regretfully come to the matter of Patrick O'Dell."

The wolfhound began to bark furiously.

"Silence," Millicent commanded, "or I'll have Anatole confine you to the cellar."

The animal whimpered pitifully for a moment, then subsided.

"What brought that on?" I asked.

"Probably the name of Patrick O'Dell."

"Incredible. Does the dog know Pat, by any chance?"

"The real question, Charles, is whether I knew Patrick O'Dell, isn't it?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it is, Millicent."

"What makes you so interested in the answer?"

"Well, as I told you on the phone yesterday, I need the information for a client."

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"Is the client's identity to remain a secret?"

"Not necessarily. Her name is Norma Confrey. She's a cousin of mine."

"And what is her relationship to Patrick O'Dell?"

The dog started a deep growl and stifled it.

"They're going to be married," I said. "That is, if I can find him."

Millicent poured more champagne for both of us, then said, "How is it, Charles, that you connect my name with Patrick O'Dell's?"

"I'm not exactly the original maker of this connection. The idea came from Norma." Draining off half the wine—the glasses had been refilled—I reached for my attaché case. "When Pat turned up missing six days ago, Norma went to his apartment. She had a key because it is soon supposed to be their apartment and she was shifting the furniture in her spare time."

"Naturally," said Millicent, not too enigmatically.

I opened the case in my lap and next resorted to the remainder of the wine. "Among Pat's personal papers, Norma found a note purportedly written in your hand and at least signed by you. I checked the signature against the one that appears on several county documents—it's yours all right, Millicent, or a beautiful forgery."

"And what did I say in this note to Miss Confrey's precious Pat?" asked Millicent with a teasing note of challenge.

The hound groaned audibly for a split second.

"You invited him to visit you at his earliest convenience for the purpose of renewing the brief but inspiring—these are your own adjectives—relationship begun so fortuitously at Hialeah."

"That's the race track?"

"That's the race track."

"Is your Patrick O'Dell a jockey?"

"He's a veterinarian. Quite a good one, I guess. He had never been to Hialeah in his life until a month ago and then he was called in to consult about a suspected bone disease in a horse."

Millicent again poured champagne. The bottle, like those self-replenishing vessels in Oriental myths, seemed full as ever. A slightly intoxicated thought rambled past my preoccupied mind: how endless a magnum is.

"You have the alleged note in your possession, Charles?" Millicent was saying.

"Yes. An azure rag-paper engraved with your crest. The G. Right here." I extricated the letter in question from the *Goodis, Millicent* folder in my attaché case. "Your salutation is most affectionate. It almost makes me jealous. 'My dearest Pat,' you begin—now that's strange, that's very strange."

"Not really, Charles. At times I can be extremely affectionate."

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"I mean the page is blank." I spoke exclusively to myself as I turned the notepaper from one side to the other. "Not the trace of a single word. Not even the crest. Nothing."

"Perhaps I write my billets-doux with invisible ink." Her laughter was musical but triumphant. "So much for the insidious horse doctor, Charles."

To cover my bewilderment I took a deep draft of wine. Instead of clearing the fog gathered behind my eyes it thickened it a bit. Across Millicent's lingering laughter I detected a braying counterpoint.

I got to my feet somewhat unsteadily and saw the itchy mule standing big-eared and open-mouthed 30 feet off in an azalea bed. It wore, I noticed, a halter of woven jute. That's what makes it itchy, I thought, but I must have expressed the thought aloud.

"Itchy. Who in the world are you talking about, Charles?" Millicent was also on her feet. "Are you feeling well?"

"I'm not sure. The champagne seems to have hit me."

"I think you should lie down then." She set her glass aside, took me by the elbow, and led me to a nearby lounge chair with a depressible back. Her cool hand was a balm to my clammily knitted brow, and I was about to surrender myself to gentle delirium when something prickly hot stabbed the back of my right hand. I came bolt upright.

"What ails you, Charles?" Millicent explained, with just the hint of annoyance.

"Something—" Michael the wolfhound, at her side, caught my eye with his lolling bologna of a tongue and I realized at once that *that* was what had touched me, licking voraciously (?) or amiably (?). "I'm out of kilter somehow. Forgive me. Doesn't the wine affect you at all?"

"Not noticeably. May I get you some more?"

I said Yes when I meant No. I tried to amend the mistake by shaking my head vigorously, but somehow I nodded it idiotically instead. At the table Millicent tilted the infinite magnum over the glasses. I recovered my ability to speak only when the fingers of my dog-kissed wet right hand received the crystal stem that bore the vinous blossom.

"Another thing. Please. Please?"

"Of course, my comely lawyer."

"Case. The attached, the attacked, the attaché. You understand. Please?"

"Yes." She loomed, a divine translucence, above me. "But why?"

"A dossier," I muttered, drinking the wine in spite of myself. "Contains dossier. On you. Your husbands, others, Durton Bray."

"You mean, Charles, you have been doing research into my past?"

"Background. Legal routine. Questions arise. Where do the men

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go? Ask myself. Ask yourself. Now. Where?"

"Do you know the answer?"

"No."

"Anatole." Her low voice, suddenly raised, stabilized my spinning faculties.

The black man soon appeared, also looming; and the white-fanged, hot-tongued hound.

"I know they don't come home again," I said. "That much I do know."

"Cremate this attaché case, Anatole," said Millicent in a voice as suddenly strange to me as my own. "Now."

"Oui, mademoiselle."

"We," I said in a final struggle against utter incoherence. "We must not mis. Under. Stand? Please."

My last conscious thought was: how odd it is that Miss Goodis (which at this moment manifested itself on my fading mental retina as "Miss Goddess") does not find my speech blockage odd . . .

I slid expansively beneath a soft slow avalanche of snowy sheep. The face of my part-time stenographer passed severally by, pursued by a recurring ram with horns the size of cornucopias. I tried to shout a warning but couldn't pronounce her right name, which was Hattie; it persisted in being enunciated as Penelope . . .

When I regained consciousness I was panting desperately and for some reason was lying on my belly. I opened my eyes to look at my hands stretched out in a strange fashion on the lounge's brocaded pattern. But my hands were not hands. They were sable-furred paws. My jaw fell and I emitted an astonished bark.

An answering bark nipped at my muffled ears. Raising my protuberant muzzle, I turned an abashed eye on the Irish wolfhound and saw, truckling in its superstructure, the missing Patrick O'Dell. I wanted to say "I'll be damed", but the words came out in three short yelps. Pat replied in kind.

"The collar, Anatole." It was Millicent Goodis' enchanting voice threaded this time with a strident note of command. "Quick—before he fully orients himself."

The majordomo came toward me with a chain choke collar. As he began to slip it over my head, I reacted with a new instinct and bit him viciously in the wrist and then leaped from the lounge and scampered across the terrace tiles to the lawn.

The itchy mule was still loitering in the azalea bed and it grinned as I approached. Burton Dray, of course —I recognized him from his picture in the newspapers.

I trotted to the driveway with Burton Dray lumbering along beside me. But as we neared the gate I saw the bearded keeper approaching us with a bull whip coiled around his great forearm. He had been notified of developments, presumably by phone, from the mansion.

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I wasn't a large dog but I realized I was not small enough to squeeze through the openwork of the gate, even if I were willing to risk a laying on of the lash. So I veered off the road and into the higher grass that bordered it. Promptly I knew the move had been a mistake. The grass was so thick and wiry that it considerably hampered my gait.

Casting a glance over my haunches, I saw that the gatekeeper had also left the road and was covering a vast amount of ground on his piledriver legs. He was already uncoiling the whip. In a matter of seconds he would be able to snap my legs out from under me with a flick of his wrist.

It was then that Burton Dray, behaving more like a first-string guard than a second-string linebacker, charged past me and took the keeper out of action with the most bone-crushing block I've ever seen.

A happy yip greeted the downfall. It came from Harold the Scottish terrier who came plowing, chin up, through a patch of dandelions. With my canine insight I saw that Harold in reality was a sandy-haired man with a freckled face and a Puckish mouth. In my dossier there had been a rumored romance between Millicent Goodis and a man later apprehended for poaching on Andrew Goodis' game preserve in Scotland. Perhaps this was the man.

The poacher, as I recall, had vanished from the view of family and friends after his fine had been paid by an anonymous benefactor. But regardless of Harold's origin, he had the true poacher's ability to find a hole in a fence and he led me to it.

As I prepared to leave I indicated that my freckled friend should join me, but he shook his head sadly and managed to draw attention to his collar. Then it all came back in a flood of memory.

It was the collar that held them in thralldom. When they made too deep an obeisance before their lovely enchantress, she slipped the collar over their heads and around their throats and they were held evermore in a bondage they could not break by themselves.

Even the hole in the fence did not represent freedom to Harold. He was held by an invisible leash that prevented him from moving outside to the mundane but wider avenues of the world and assuming his true identity.

It came back to me with enormous force now because, with slight variations, it had happened once before, in another age, when I was known only by my surname and the Goodis Estate, floating in the waters of Oceanus, was called Circe's Isle.

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THE FIRST PLAINCLOTHES PROCEDURAL

England's earliest professional detective was the colorful Bow Street Runner, "popularly supposed to be a miracle of detective skill . . . The 'Bow Street runner' was a name of terror to the burglar and thief, and their red waistcoats were familiar everywhere."

Then in 1829 Sir Robert Peel founded London's first official (and effective) police force—men armed only with truncheons and wearing top hats which, significantly, were strengthened by thick leather crowns (the criminals had their own truncheons, remember). This first metropolitan police, whose headquarters became known as Scotland Yard, replaced the Bow Street Runners and the parish constables and night watchmen. The "peelers," as Sir Robert's policemen were called (also "bobbies"), had no easy time of it: they were sneered at and scorned by the professional criminals, hooted at and ridiculed by the general public, and attacked and censured by the Parliament and the Press.

In the early 1840s a separate Detective Department was established at Scotland Yard, and in 1845 Sir James Graham, the Commissioner at the time, detailed twelve police officers for exclusive plainclothes detective work—the embryo of London's famous C.I.D., created in 1876. The first writer to recognize the importance of this revolutionary step was the great Charles Dickens.

It is usually stated that the first appearance of a Scotland Yard detective in English fiction occurs in Dickens' BLEAK HOUSE *(1852–3)—Inspector Bucket, supposedly modeled on Inspector Field, one of the twelve men who formed the nucleus which later became the C.I.D. But actually Dickens' first stories about English detectives appeared in 1850—in four issues of "Household Words" (which Dickens edited) and reprinted the same year in Volume I of* HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

Dickens' stories were really documentaries—real-life anecdotes in fictional form describing the procedural "techniques" of these first plainclothes detectives. Here is one of them, featuring Inspector Wield (obviously an earlier version of Inspector Field), and if the detection seems primitive by contemporary standards, it has all the flavor and gusto of Charles Dickens' magazine pieces.

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THE PAIR OF GLOVES

by CHARLES DICKENS

"IT'S A SINGLER STORY, SIR," SAID Inspector Wield, of the Detective Police, who, in company with Sergeants Dornton and Mith, paid us another twilight visit, one July evening; "and I've been thinking you might like to know it.

"It's concerning the murder of the young woman, Eliza Grimwood, some years ago, over in the Waterloo Road. She was commonly called The Countess because of her handsome appearance and her proud way of carrying of herself; and when I saw the poor Countess (I had known her well to speak to), lying dead, with her throat cut, on the floor of her bedroom, you'll believe me that a variety of reflections calculated to make a man rather low in his spirits, came into my head.

"That's neither here nor there. I went to the house the morning after the murder, and examined the body, and made a general observation of the bedroom where it was. Turning down the pillow of the bed with my hand, I found, underneath it, a pair of gloves. A pair of gentleman's dress gloves, very dirty; and inside the lining, the letters TR, and a cross.

"Well, sir, I took them gloves away, and I showed 'em to the magistrate, over at Union Hall, before whom the case was. He says, 'Wield,' he says, 'there's no doubt this is a discovery that may lead to something very important; and what you have got to do, Wield, is to find out the owner of these gloves.'

"I was of the same opinion, of course, and I went at it immediately. I looked at the gloves pretty narrowly, and it was my opinion that they had been cleaned. There was a smell of sulphur and rosin about 'em, you know, which cleaned gloves usually have, more or less. I took 'em over to a friend of mine at Kennington, who was in that line, and I put it to him. 'What do you say now? Have these gloves been cleaned?' 'These gloves have been cleaned,' says he. 'Have you any idea who cleaned them?' says I. 'Not at all,' says he; 'I've a very distinct idea who *didn't* clean 'em, and that's myself. But I'll tell you what, Wield, there ain't above eight or nine reg'lar glove-cleaners in London,'—there were not, at that time, it seems—'and I think I can give you their addresses, and you may find out, by that means, who did clean 'em.'

"Accordingly, he gave me the directions, and I went here, and I went there, and I looked up this man, and I looked up that man; but, though they all agreed that the gloves had been cleaned, I couldn't find the man, woman, or child, that had cleaned that pair of gloves.

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"What with this person not being at home, and that person being expected home in the afternoon, and so forth, the inquiry took me three days. On the evening of the third day, coming over Waterloo Bridge from the Surrey side of the river, quite beat, and very much vexed and disappointed, I thought I'd have a shilling's worth of entertainment at the Lyceum Theatre to freshen myself up. So I went into the Pit, at half-price, and I sat myself down next to a very quiet, modest sort of young man. Seeing I was a stranger, he told me the names of the actors on the stage, and we got into conversation.

"When the play was over, we came out together, and I said, 'We've been very companionable and agreeable, and perhaps you wouldn't object to a dram?' 'Well, you're very good,' says he; 'I *shouldn't* object to a dram.' Accordingly, we went to a public-house, near the Theatre, sat ourselves down in a quiet room up-stairs on the first floor, and called for a pint of half-and-half apiece, and a pipe.

"Well, sir, we put our pipes aboard, and we drank our half-and-half, and sat a-talking, very sociably, when the young man says, 'You must excuse me stopping very long,' he says, 'because I'm forced to go home in good time. I must be at work all night.' 'At work all night?' says I. 'You ain't a baker?' 'No,' he says, laughing, 'I ain't a baker.' 'I thought not,' says I, 'you haven't the looks of a baker.' 'No,' says he, 'I'm a glove-cleaner.'

"I never was more astonished in my life, than when I heard them words come out of his lips. 'You're a glove-cleaner, are you?' says I. 'Yes,' he says, 'I am.' 'Then, perhaps,' says I, taking the gloves out of my pocket, 'you can tell me who cleaned this pair of gloves? It's a rum story,' I says to him, 'I was dining over at Lambeth when some gentleman, he left these gloves behind him! Another gentleman and me, you see, we laid a wager of a sovereign, that I wouldn't find out who they belonged to. I've spent as much as seven shillings already, in trying to discover; but, if you could help me, I'd stand another seven and welcome. You see there's TR and a cross, inside.'

" 'I see,' he says. 'Bless you, *I* know these gloves very well! I've seen dozens of pairs belonging to the same party.' 'No?' says I. 'Yes,' says he. 'Then you know who cleaned 'em?' says I. 'Rather so,' says he. 'My father cleaned 'em.'

" 'Where does your father live?' says I. 'Just round the corner,' says the young man, 'near Exeter Street, here. He'll tell you who they belong to, directly.' 'Would you come round with me now?' says I. 'Certainly,' says he.

"We went round to the place, and there we found an old man in a white apron, with two or three daughters, all rubbing and cleaning away at lots of gloves, in a front

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parlour. 'Oh, Father!' says the young man, 'here's a person been and made a bet about the ownership of a pair of gloves and I've told him you can settle it.' 'Good evening, sir,' says I to the old gentleman. 'Here's the gloves your son speaks of. Letters TR, you see, and a cross.' 'Oh, yes,' he says, 'I know these gloves very well. They belong to Mr. Trinkle, the great upholsterer in Cheapside.'

"'Did you get 'em from Mr. Trinkle, direct,' says I, 'if you'll excuse my asking the question?' 'No,' says he; 'Mr. Trinkle always sends 'em to Mr. Phibbs's, the haberdasher's, opposite his shop, and the haberdasher sends 'em to me.' 'Perhaps *you* wouldn't object to a dram?' says I. 'Not in the least!' says he. So I took the old gentleman out, and had a little more talk with him and his son, over a glass, and we parted excellent friends.

"This was late on a Saturday night. First thing on the Monday morning, I went to the haberdasher's shop, opposite Mr. Trinkle's, the great upholsterer's in Cheapside. 'Mr. Phibbs in the way?' 'My name is Phibbs.' 'Oh! I believe you sent this pair of gloves to be cleaned?' 'Yes, I did, for young Mr. Trinkle over the way. There he is in the shop.' 'Oh! that's him in the shop, is it? Him in the green coat?' 'The same individual.' 'Well, Mr. Phibbs, this is an unpleasant affair; but the fact is, I am Inspector Wield of the Detective Police, and I found these gloves under the pillow of the young woman that was murdered the other day, over in the Waterloo Road.'

"'Good Heaven!' says he. 'He's a most respectable young man, and if his father was to hear of it, it would be the ruin of him!' 'I'm very sorry for it,' says I, 'but I must take him into custody.' 'Good Heaven!' says Mr. Phibbs, again; 'can nothing be done?' 'Nothing,' says I. 'Will you allow me to call him over here,' says he, 'that his father may not see it done?' 'I don't object to that,' says I; 'but unfortunately, Mr. Phibbs, I can't allow of any communication between you. If any was attempted, I should have to interfere directly. Perhaps you'll beckon him over here?'

"Mr. Phibbs went to the door and beckoned, and the young fellow came across the street directly; a smart, brisk young fellow.

"'Good morning, sir,' says I. 'Good morning, sir,' says he. 'Would you allow me to inquire, sir,' says I, 'if you ever had any acquaintance with a party of the name of Grimwood?' 'Grimwood! Grimwood!' says he. 'No!' 'You know the Waterloo Road?' 'Oh! of course I know the Waterloo Road!' 'Happen to have heard of a young woman being murdered there?' 'Yes, I read it in the paper, and very sorry I was to read it.' 'Here's a pair of gloves belonging to you, that I found under her pillow the morning afterwards!'

"He was in a dreadful state, sir;

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a dreadful state! 'Mr. Wield,' he says, 'upon my solemn oath I never was there. I never so much as saw her, to my knowledge, in my life!' 'I am very sorry,' says I. 'To tell you the truth; I don't think you *are* the murderer, but I must take you to Union Hall in a cab. However, I think it's a case of that sort, that, at present, at all events, the magistrate will hear it in private.'

"A private examination took place, and then it came out that this young man was acquainted with a cousin of the unfortunate Eliza Grimwood, and that, calling to see this cousin a day or two before the murder, he left these gloves upon the table. Who should come in, shortly afterwards, but Eliza Grimwood. 'Whose gloves are these?' she says, taking 'em up. 'Those are Mr. Trinkle's gloves,' says her cousin. 'Oh!' says she, 'they are very dirty, and of no use to him, I am sure. I shall take 'em away for my girl to clean the stoves with.' And she put 'em in her pocket. The girl had used 'em to clean the stoves, and, I have no doubt, had left 'em lying on the bedroom mantelpiece, and her mistress, looking round to see that the room was tidy, had caught 'em up and put 'em under the pillow where I found 'em.

"That's the story, sir."

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE AUTHORSHIP: *It is possible that the four police articles which appeared in "Household Words," usually credited to Charles Dickens, were not the work of Charles Dickens alone, but of Dickens in collaboration with Wilkie Collins.*

Two of the stories, including "A [sic] Pair of Gloves," are to be found in TALES AND FANTASIES, *a collection of stories by English authors, published by Lantos of Budapest, Hungary (date unknown). The two stories are ascribed to the author's name of Charles Collins.*

When it is remembered that Dickens and Collins did collaborate on various work, and that Collins contributed frequently to "Household Words" (edited by Dickens) both in his own name and anonymously, it would seem that the most likely interpretation of the author's name of "Charles Collins" is that it represents a combination of Charles Dickens-and-Wilkie Collins, with Dickens' last name and Collins' first name omitted to form a joint pseudonym.

If this theory is correct, we would have preferred a turnabout pseudonym: doesn't the name Wilkie Dickens make your 'tec taste buds water?

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. . . in which Henry Barrington, "one of the greatest actors ever to tread the boards," gives his most scintillating performance . . .

THIRD ACT CURTAIN

by PRINCESS ZAWADSKY

FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THE KILLER broke in, Henry Barrington was talking on the phone.

"But Cynthia darling. It's not as though I were asking for a million." His famous voice purred persuasively. "All I need is a measly fifty thousand—the kind of cash you keep around the house. And you'll have it back as soon as my new play opens."

Cynthia's reply was a cold, unqualified "no"; and she hung up before Henry had the pleasure of slamming the receiver in her ear.

He stood glowering at the gold and white phone, wishing it was Cynthia's gold hair and white neck; wishing he could twist that neck until her screams filled his penthouse apartment.

After all he had been to her—friend, lover, mentor. Why, no one had even given her a walk-on until *he* wangled her the ingenue lead in *Masters and Mistresses!*

What if he *had* left her waiting at the church? —well, the City Hall, actually. No woman becomes a great actress without suffering. His personal rebuff, and the resultant publicity, had helped make her a star as much as his professional favor.

Henry banged his fist against the Sheraton desk. That was the trouble, damn it! Cynthia *had* become a star and *her* star was still on the rise. Whereas *his* star . . . He glared at his image in the gilded mirror above the marble mantel. For one terrible moment he was aware of the receding hairline, the pouches under the eyes. He blinked, then forced himself into his usual rut of self-admiration. Regard the still-handsome profile, the charming twinkle in the deep blue eyes.

Fifty wasn't old, damn it! All he needed was one hit play that would make up for the last five failures. And he *had* the play—a great comedy by a new writer, with a part tailor-made for Henry Barrington. But what good was the perfect play without the money to produce it?

"Why not back it yourself?" Cynthia had asked knowingly.

Back it himself! He couldn't even back himself by himself. And the creditors could smell it—the foul smell of impending bankruptcy. They were closing in on him by mail, phone, and registered letter Soon they'd be sniffing at the door

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to the penthouse—if he could manage to pay the rent on *that*.

He tried desperately to think of someone besides Cynthia—anyone—whom he had helped or favored in the past. Not a single name came to mind.

Henry walked to the bar and poured himself a glass of Scotch. His gaze lingered for a moment on the bottle of sleeping pills beside the half-empty Scotch bottle.

"Maybe that's the answer," he said softly. "To sleep and *not* to dream."

He wasn't sure he meant it. But what would happen when the Scotch bottle was empty? He didn't even have enough money to buy a fresh bottle; and a threatening letter from the liquor store had arrived only that morning.

He was still staring at the sleeping pills when the French doors of the balcony flew open.

Henry whirled around. A tall ugly man stood just inside the balcony windows, pointing a gun at the actor's face. Henry wasn't really frightened. It was too much like a scene from one of his plays. He waited, in mild surprise, for his cue.

"This is a holdup, Barrington," the stranger growled. "I want your cash and I want it fast."

Henry laughed out loud. *This* play, it seemed, was a farce.

"What's so funny?" snarled the intruder, eyes narrowed.

"The entire situation," Barrington replied. "You see, I don't have a dollar to my name."

"Don't make me laugh," said the stranger. "A layout like this smells of money." He walked toward Henry, still pointing the gun at his head. The two of them were of the same height, and Henry found himself staring into the two meanest eyes he had ever seen.

"You don't understand," the actor explained hastily. "This is all a front. I don't own any of it. I—"

"I'll count to ten," the stranger cut in. "And unless you fork over the cash, I'll pull this trigger."

In one horrible instant Henry Barrington's emotions caught up with him. This was no laughable melodrama in which he could be shot one instant and take a curtain call the next. This ugly man with his ugly gun was real; and in ten seconds Henry Barrington could stop being real.

Forgotten were the sleeping pills, the toying with suicide, as Barrington realized that he wanted to live, that he wanted to eke out every possible moment of life—in luxury if possible, but without it if necessary.

"But I tell you—" Henry said.

"One—two—three," the intruder began.

"Please," Barrington pleaded. "Don't kill me. Not yet. I—"

"Four—five—six." The stranger counted in a slow, guttural monotone, like an unfeeling robot. Nothing Barrington could say would

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;et through to him. "Seven—eight —"

Henry closed his eyes—trying to emember some snatch of prayer rom a recent play; but all he could ıuster was "Now I lay me down to leep."

"Nine," said the voice, as the ac- ›r awaited the fateful "ten" and ıe ensuing sound of a shot. In- ead, Henry heard a groan, an out- ·y of pain, and a thud.

For an instant Henry thought he ıight be hearing his own voice, ıe sound of his own body hitting ıe floor. Then, assured that no gun ıd been fired, that no part of his ›dy had been touched, the actor ›ened his eyes.

The stranger lay on the floor be- le Henry, clutching at his chest. enry, unable to move, watched e gunman writhe.

"My heart," whispered the gun- an. "My heart, damn it. It's my art." He gasped once more; then was quiet.

Henry stared at the gunman in ›t fascination. He was afraid to ›ve, afraid the stranger would ddenly leap to his feet and rasp n!" Finally, when his nerves ıld stand the strain no longer, enry kneeled cautiously and ered down at the stranger. Then, a sudden impulse, Henry ned closer to the gunman's face d shouted "Boo!"

The intruder's glazed eyes con- ıued to stare up at Henry like ı eyes in a Dali painting. Only then did the actor feel complete relief.

Trembling, Henry hurried across the room to call the police. His hand was on the receiver when his trembling ceased and his reason returned.

Obviously the gunman was a professional thief, Henry reasoned, and possibly this was not his first holdup of the evening. The police could wait, but Henry's immediate needs could not. Henry nodded to himself, went to the hall closet, and got a pair of doeskin gloves. Pulling on the gloves, he approached the corpse on the Oriental rug. (He had not played in half a dozen thrillers without learning a thing or two about fingerprints.)

The wallet was in the gunman's breast pocket. And, to Henry's delight, his impulse paid off. The wallet was stuffed with bills, totaling $749. Henry smiled at the irony of the situation: he who had come to rob would be robbed.

He was about to replace the empty wallet when a tingle of curiosity stopped him. Who *was* this man who had broken into the penthouse to die? Searching quickly through the wallet, Henry found no sign whatever of identification. He shrugged. A killer, after all, would hardly carry around his Social Security card.

Then, leaning over to replace the wallet, Henry noticed the jagged end of a piece of paper protruding from the breast pocket of the

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corpse. Interested, he pulled out the paper and unfolded it.

It was a newspaper clipping that read: *One of Ten Most Wanted Men Escapes Prison in Daring Helicopter Break. Marston Eludes Law.* Below the headline was a picture, and even in that blurry reproduction there was no mistaking those eyes.

A cold tremor shot up Henry's spine as he realized that Robert Marston, a convicted killer, had held a gun to his head only moments before.

Henry folded the clipping and returned it. In a way, he mused, Marston and he had a lot in common. Only a tremendous vanity could have led Marston to keep that clipping when all other traces of his identity had been removed.

Henry stared down at the corpse and suddenly he was filled with disgust. "Lot in common, indeed!" he muttered. Why, the only thing that Marston and he had had in common were a similar height and build—and, of course, a need for money.

Money! In a rush all the desperation Henry had felt before Marston's entrance returned to him. The past half hour had taught him only one thing: he wanted to live. But his encounter with the gunman had not changed his financial plight, except for $749.

In a spurt of anger Henry almost kicked the corpse.

"Why the hell didn't you rob a bank before coming here?" he demanded.

$100,000—$200,000. *That* would have made Henry's sufferin worthwhile. With a grimace Hen ry started again toward the phon

"If *I* had been in his place," h muttered, "even for a short time, would have made a coup wort sweating for."

Henry stopped short. The pl did not really leap into his mir full-blown. But the idea for tl marvelous masquerade thrill through his brain like a play in ou line form. And he knew in an i stant that all he needed was to f in the lines and the stage directio and it would be a complete succe

Robert Marston lay dead at He ry's feet and Henry was one of t greatest actors ever to tread t boards. What was to stop him fro *becoming* Robert Marston?—on for a short time, only long enou to pay off his debts and back t new play.

Pacing the floor, Henry began explore the possibilities and pitfa of his brainstorm.

In the first place, no one kn that Marston was in the penthou By keeping the door locked and fusing to answer the bell, Her could keep Marston's body th long enough to work out all the tails. Instinctively, he hurried the door, double locked it, and p the chain on; then he closed a locked the French doors to the b cony.

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Eventually, of course, he would have to dispose of the body. But first, he would need all that it had to offer. Like lines from a play, once memorized and never wholly forgotten, the parts of his plan fell into place.

He would need pictures of Marston's face, front and profile, in order to do a good job of make-up. All right. His camera would give him clear photographs in a matter of minutes.

Next he would need evidence—incontrovertible evidence—of Marston's presence at the scene of each crime. Henry frowned. People were stupid and unpredictable about identification. They might not identify him as "Marston" in spite of excellent make-up and perfect acting.

But if Marston left his fingerprints, no one could possibly question his guilt. Henry would use Marston's own possessions—wallet, comb, watch. Three objects. Good! That meant that Henry would be able to commit three crimes in Marston's name. Three crimes and no more.

Sitting on the chaise longue for a few moments, Henry calculated that with luck three robberies should net him at least $100,000. He would choose three places he knew intimately, three places where there would be no risk, no chance of being caught. He considered the most likely victims.

There was one theater office he knew as well as his own apartment. He could hit that on Saturday night while the manager was counting the week's receipts.

Then there was Wally Kling, the producer who had refused to do Henry's new play. Wally always kept large amounts of cash in his apartment safe—in case of emergency expenditures, over the weekend. Henry smiled. Wally would be producing the play after all. A nice touch, that.

For a while he was puzzled about the third and last robbery. Who else did he know who kept large amounts of money on hand? It must be money, of course; he had no means of "fencing" jewelry or other valuables.

Cynthia! He almost laughed out loud. Cynthia, who didn't "believe" in banks; Cynthia, who had refused him the measly $50,000 he had asked for his play. Yes, Cynthia would be the final irony, the perfect third act.

Satisfied, Henry started to pour himself another Scotch. Then he thought better of it. There was work to be done, and he needed a clear head.

He brought out his camera and took eight good shots of the corpse's face. He really wouldn't need much make-up, he decided. A wig, of course, a dark stubble, a little putty for the nose, and cotton balls in the cheeks to round them out. He hid the developed prints under his mattress.

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It was a pity, he reflected, that he did not have a tape recording of Marston's voice. Still, Henry was certain that his memory for intonations and bodily movements was almost perfect.

His next step was to get Marston's fingerprints on the comb, the watch, and the wallet. He remembered, too, to leave Marston's imprint on the desk so that there would be evidence that the gunman had been in Henry's penthouse.

The final step was the riskiest—disposal of the body. The idea was particularly distasteful to Henry because he realized he would have to obliterate all indications of Marston's identity.

Henry decided to pretend that he was merely playing a role in another crime melodrama. That way his mind would remain clear and alert, and he would feel no emotion when it came to the messy part.

The most difficult part of the whole disposal problem was lugging Marston around. Luckily there was not much lifting involved.

Before he left the apartment, Henry decided what he would say in case of emergency. The gun was locked in Marston's hand; and Henry made no attempt, for the present, to pry it loose. If he was intercepted along the way, he would say that the criminal had been forcing him at gunpoint and that, suddenly, Marston had dropped dead. An autopsy would confirm Marston's death by heart failure.

Henry had no trouble getting the dead man out of the building. He used the private elevator which, on other occasions, had facilitated discreet entrances and exits by ladies of his acquaintance. Leaving Marston in the elevator, Henry went to the garage for his Mercedes, tipping the boy with one of the gunman's bills. The lateness of the hour was in Henry's favor. No one was in sight on the side street as the actor dragged Marston the short distance to the car. The drive itself involved no risks at all.

Henry's destination was the Marina, where he kept his small but perfectly outfitted cabin cruiser. He smiled to himself. What a break that Marston had chosen tonight to drop dead. Tomorrow, if the finance company followed through on its threat, the cabin cruiser would no longer be Henry's.

Henry waved to the watchman as he drove past. The watchman waved back. He was accustomed to Henry's late arrivals—usually in the company of a lovely young starlet. The actor's midnight cruises were, in fact, his only reason for possessing the cruiser. Actually he detested outdoor sports. But when it came to indoor sports, Henry had long since discovered that a boat surpassed a car or even an apartment. After all, what girl could walk out in the middle of the bay?

Henry drove the Mercedes as

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close as possible to the water's edge; then he made a careful inventory before he took his guest on board the cruiser. No one paid the slightest attention as Henry steered the cruiser out into the deep water.

The grisly business that followed took less than an hour. When Henry was finished, Marston—sans fingerprints and sans teeth—was wrapped in a blanket, weighted down with the spare anchor, and tossed into the water.

Henry then docked his cruiser, drove the Mercedes back to the garage, took the elevator to his penthouse, waited for another hour; and then he called the police.

Killer Robs Famous Actor read the headlines the next day. Henry was mildly annoyed that Marston received top billing; but he considered the content of the article most satisfactory. "Mr. Barrington told police that Marston had robbed him of $200, a pair of diamond cuff links and a valuable watch," read the news story. "The actor assured authorities, however, that his most valuable assets were not kept in the apartment, but were stored in a safety-deposit box at the bank."

Henry chuckled as he recalled that those valuable assets consisted of two defunct sweepstakes tickets and a zircon ring. However, with the suggestion of wealth planted in the paper, no one would think of questioning his affluence when those assets increased considerably over the next three weeks.

All day Henry received calls of sympathy, calls of curiosity, and requests for interviews (several of them from creditors). That evening Henry took the telephone off the hook, put the chain on the door, and brought out his make-up kit. By midnight Henry had pulled off his first successful coup—or, rather, "Robert Marston" had committed another ruthless robbery. A well-known theater had been robbed of its entire week's receipts—$64,000 in unmarked bills. The theater manager had positively identified Marston from his Rogues' Gallery pictures and the police had developed Marston's fingerprints on a comb the thief had inadvertently dropped at the scene of the crime.

Henry was exultant. $64,000 for an hour's work! He relaxed on his chaise longue and relived the scene in his mind. Surprising how frightened he had been, just before he pointed the gun at the manager—worse than any case of stage fright he could remember. But the excitement of success! More exciting by far than a first-night triumph.

It was a good thing he was planning only three of these performances—a limited engagement, so to speak. Any more might be too much for him.

The second robbery, a week later, proved even more satisfying than the first. The robbery of Wally Kling had a touch of personal revenge in it, and Henry prolonged the moments when Kling stood

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shaking at the point of the gun. Then, surreptitiously, Henry dropped Marston's watch, took the $30,000 that Kling had in his wall safe, and returned to his penthouse.

Henry could hardly bear the suspense of waiting for his third and last appearance as "Robert Marston." He had planned the time for midnight of the following Monday. Cynthia, he knew, always dismissed her maid and retired, exhausted, to her rooms after her first performance of the week. And Henry was more than familiar with the back staircase that led to her apartment. He envisoned her terror, her pleading, her reluctant parting with the money, and he literally tingled with anticipation.

Finally, Monday night arrived. He was especially careful with his make-up this time. What a challenge to his acting ability! To deceive his former mistress would be worthy of a Tony and an Oscar combined.

He had no difficulty reaching the apartment unseen; and he was tempted to use the key she had once given him to open the door. But he decided it would be safer to use the old "telegram" ruse to gain entry. Cynthia, her golden hair tousled, her violet eyes sleepy, answered the door.

His own performance and Cynthia's performance were everything he had hoped for. She screamed, she wept, she pleaded, and, finally, pale with fear she dredged up the money that he knew she had hidden like a squirrel's supply of nuts, in hiding places all over the apartment.

"How much?" he snarled in a perfect imitation of Marston's voice.

"Forty thousand," she whispered. "It's all I have—I swear it."

He was trembling so with the excitement and triumph that he could hardly hold the gun.

"Hand it over," he demanded.

His hand reached out for it. He almost touched it. And then came the pain—ripping through his chest, doubling him over in agony..

"Cynthia!" he called out, in his own voice. "Cynthia, help me."

She stared down at him, shock and amazement mirrored in her violet eyes. "I—who—what?" she stammered, like an ingenue in her first performance.

"It's me," he cried out. "Henry. You've got to help me. Fast."

The pain came again and he writhed on the floor.

"Henry!" Her voice seemed to come from a long way off. "Henry Barrington! What kind of ghastly joke is this?"

"No joke," he whispered. "My heart." He had a feeling that he was repeating a line—a curtain line; but not from any play he had done before. "My heart, damn it. It's my heart."

Cynthia stood over him, unmoved and unmoving, for a full five minutes after he died.

"His heart," she repeated finally, dully. "Funny. I didn't really think he had one."

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The consensus of the readers on our staff was that Joan Kapp's "Mystery, Movie Style" is a "fun story." We agree—have fun!

MYSTERY, MOVIE STYLE

by JOAN KAPP

I HAD SIX WATCHES ON MY LEFT arm; topaz and hammered silver bracelets on my right arm—about six of those, too; and at least a dozen rings on my fingers, mostly diamond, some sapphire, and one real keen lapis lazuli. At this point two gentlemen entered the store.

"This is a stickup," the one with the dimple in his chin said.

"I'll be darned," I said, "Just like in the movies."

"Huh?" he said.

"You know," I said. "In the movies the crook always marches in and says, 'This is a stickup.' Corny, huh?"

The man with the dimple said to the other man, the man in a belted, double-breasted trench coat, "What did I say wrong?"

"A belted, double-breasted trench coat," I said. "Wow! This gets better and better."

"And this, sister, is a robbery," Trench Coat said. "Not like in the movies either. No fuzz busting in to save you in the nick of time."

"Hey, Bennie, look!" Dimple was speaking. "Look at her arms. She's covered with the stuff."

Trench Coat gaped.

"Naughty, naughty word!" he said. Crescendo-like.

"This is a lapis lazuli," I said, pointing to the blue stone on the index finger of my left hand. "It's not worth much, but it's sure got class."

"You can keep the lupis lazi," Trench Coat said. His name was obviously Bennie, and obviously he was the boss. "What we want are the other trinkets adorning your Venus de Milo arms." He started to laugh and ended up coughing. "Get that one, Leo?" He poked Dimple Chin in the ribs with his elbow.

"Gee, fellows," I said. "I have an uncle named Leo and a cousin named Bennie. It's a small world."

"Ain't it the truth?" Leo the Dimple said.

"So the enmities are over and now it's time to get down to business." This was Bennie the boss speaking sarcastically. "And we do mean business, little lady." He put his hand in his pocket and I saw the bulge. Goodness, a gun.

"Goodness, a gun," I said.

"Bennie knows how to use it," Leo the Dimple offered. At which

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comment Bennie gave Leo a sharp, shut-your-mouth look.

"Nylon bag," Bennie said. He snapped his fingers. Leo the Dimple produced same after a not inconsiderable amount of fumbling through his pockets.

"Right here, Bennie," he said. At which comment Trench Coat gave him the freeze look. Benjamin, I suspected, did not like to be called Bennie by a mere assistant.

"Now, dearie, empty your arms in the bag." He shook out the bag and handed it to Leo who gripped it firmly and stood politely, arms outstretched, like some kid with a Trick-or-Treat bag on Halloween.

I slowly stripped the topaz and hammered silver bracelets, six of them, from my right arm. Slower still I removed the six watches and gently piled them on top of the topaz and hammered silver bracelets. The diamond and sapphire rings likewise.

"I can keep the lapis lazuli, mayn't I, Mr. Benjamin," I said as I gazed fondly on the ring adorning the index finger on my left hand.

"Generous is the word for Benjamin," said Trench Coat as he bowed from the waist. I noted a bald spot. "Now some more, please. Open the showcases and shove in the rest of the watches. They move fast on the market."

I moved to comply, but stopped as the front door opened. A prim and proper matronly woman of five decades entered the shop and stood agape. She had sized us up quickly.

"A robbery," she said ever so softly—*sotto voce* would be the correct term.

Trench Coat turned quickly and strode to the door, which he shut and locked. He took the lady, who now looked sick, by the arm and led her to a blue-velvet, stuffed chair.

"Nobody's going to get hurt, ma'am," he purred politely. "You just sit here and catch your breath while we finish our business."

"Where is my husband?" the lady asked in a somewhat louder voice.

"Pardon me, ma'am?" Benjamin the gentleman asked.

"My husband," she repeated more loudly. "Edwin!" she called out shrilly.

"She recovers quickly," I said to a perplexed Bennie nervously trying to quiet the hollering woman.

"Edwin! Edwin! Edwin!" she screamed.

"For the corn's sake," solid, stolid Leo the Dimple said. "Hold this," he said as he handed me the nylon bag. "Like this, Bennie," he said as he moved to the woman's side and smacked her in the gums. Whop! Whop!

She quieted.

Bennie looked and sounded shocked as he said to Leo, "Leo, you shouldn't ought to have done that."

I suspected he was pleased. I know I was.

"Gents," I said. "I suspect Edwin is the lady's husband and the owner of the store."

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"What's that?" Bennie said. He turned from a trembling lump of lady to face me. "Her husband, the owner?"

"This is the Edwin Meyer Jewelry Shop, isn't it? I mean, it says so on the door and on the calendar and on these pens." I picked up a ballpoint and read: "Edwin Meyer Jewelry Shop, Edwin Meyer, Prop."

"Where's my Edwin?" the lady sobbed.

"Where is he?" Bennie the Trench Coat asked me.

"Lean over and I'll whisper," I said. He did and I whispered, "Dead on the back-room floor, Bennie. How do you like being involved in a murder?"

Trench Coat blanched.

"You all right, Bennie?" Leo asked. "You don't look so good."

"I don't feel so good," said the boss.

"With one of these, Bennie," I explained. I opened the back of the showcase and put my hand on a thick brass candlestick.

I smiled broadly at the two gents. "This is how it's done in the movies, fellows. Shall we share the loot?"

"Nix," Trench Coat said quickly. "Leo, this gal was heisting the joint when we entered. We're cutting out fast. Loot, doll, we would share, but murder—that's something different. Come on, Leo."

He grabbed Leo who grabbed the nylon bag and pulled him toward the door. "Drop it, Leo. We're clean of this mess." Which Leo did and they left quickly.

"It worked, Mrs. Meyer," I said as I hurried to her side to comfort her.

"What worked?" she asked. "Who are you? How do you know my name?"

"I scared them off," I said. "Just a minute."

I ran to the back of the shop to a faucet I had noticed earlier. I poured some cold water in a paper cup and brought it back to her.

"Drink this, ma'am," I said, "While I explain."

"Who are you?" she repeated. She gulped down the water and hiccupped.

"My name is Donna Coleman," I said. "I started working for your husband this morning."

"Where is Edwin?"

"He spilled some jewelry cleaner on his trousers and stepped out to have them cleaned. I expect him back any minute."

She was scrutinizing me through beady, black eyes. She doesn't believe me, I thought; but that's ridiculous—I have an honest face.

"You started work this morning?" she questioned.

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "Mr. Meyer does a good business, as you know. He needs someone to help him, someone to work part-time."

"He has two sons," she said. "What do you mean you scared them off?"

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"Those men, they were robbing us blind," I said.

"Us?"

"Look at this bag," I said. I picked up the discarded nylon bag nearly full of loot and placed it on her lap. She grabbed my hand as I did so and pointed to the ring on my left index finger.

"My birthstone!" she exclaimed. "A lapis lazuli."

"It's got class," I said.

"It certainly does."

"Now then," I said very business-like. "Your husband will be back any minute. I'd like to straighten up the shop before he returns—get these things back into their correct cases—"

"Just a minute, miss." Mrs. Meyer interrupted. "Just how did you scare those two men away?"

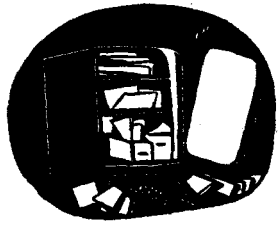
"You'll never believe it," I said laughing. My laugh was contagious and she started to laugh. "I told them *I* was robbing the place when they came in." We laughed at that. "I told them your husband was tied up in the back room." We laughed at that too.

"Now," I said, "since I do want to straighten up in here, why don't you step into the back room and lie down. There's a comfy cot back there. A few minutes' rest will do wonders for you. You've had a bad shock, you know."

"You are kind, my dear Donna," she said. "Yes, I think I'd like that. Help me, please."

I helped her to her feet and let her lean on me as we walked slowly toward the back of the shop and the cot. As we passed the display case I had previously left open, I reached in with my free hand, which was my left hand, and grabbed a heavy brass candlestick.

It would be a successful caper after all, I thought.



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a *NEW* Inspector Maigret story by

GEORGES SIMENON

first publication in the United States

Here is the second in the new series about the patient, persistent, imperturbable, pipe-smoking Inspector Maigret . . . Maigret's methods were his own: day after day on a baffling case he would keep the suspects on the go, making them repeat their actions, repeat their words, over and over again, until perhaps a forgotten detail would suddenly emerge—a clue that would point to the truth—or the murderer, under increasing psychological pressure, would be pushed to the breaking point. It was a method that worked . . .

INSPECTOR MAIGRET DIRECTS

by GEORGES SIMENON

MAIGRET PUSHED AWAY HIS plate, got up from the table, grunted, shook himself, went over to the stove, and raised the lid mechanically.

"Well, now, let's get to work. We're going to be in bed early."

And the others, sitting around the big table in the inn, looked at him with resignation. Frédéric Michaux, the proprietor, three days' stubble on his chin, was the first to get up and move to the bar. "What'll you—?"

"No," said Maigret. "No more. We've had enough. White wine, calvados, more wine and—"

They had all reached that stage of weariness where one's eyes smart and one's whole body aches. Julia, who passed for Frédéric's wife, went into the kitchen with a platter that bore the congealed remains of a dish of baked beans. Thérèse, the servant girl, wiped her eyes, but not because she was crying: she had a cold in the head.

"Where do we go back to?" she asked. "Where I've cleared away?"

"It's eight o'clock now, so we pick it up from eight o'clock in the evening."

"Then I'll bring the tablecloth and the cards."

It was hot in the inn, too hot in fact, but outside the wind was driving gusts of icy rain through the darkness.

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"Nicholas, you sit where you were last night. Monsieur Groux, you hadn't yet arrived."

"It was when I heard Groux's footsteps outside," the innkeeper interrupted, "that I said to Thérèse, 'Put the cards out.' "

"Have I got to pretend to come in all over again?" groaned Groux, a six-foot farmer, solid as a bedroom dresser.

You would have thought they were actors rehearsing a play for the twentieth time—their minds blank, their gestures limp, their eyes vacant. Maigret himself, in the role of the stage director, had some difficulty in believing it was all real. Even the place itself—imagine spending three days in an inn miles from the nearest village, in the middle of the fens of the Vendée!

The place was called Pont-du-Grau, and there was in fact a bridge, a long wooden bridge over a sort of muddy canal, filled twice a day by the tide. But the sea could not be seen: all there was to see was fenland, crisscrossed by ditches, and far away on the horizon flat roofs, farms—called "cabins" in these parts.

Why was this inn here by the roadside? For sportsmen after duck and plover? There was a red-painted gasoline pump in the yard, and on the gable end there was a big blue advertisement for a brand of chocolate.

On the other side of the bridge was a hovel—nothing more than a rabbit hutch—the home of old Nicholas, who was an eel fisher. Three hundred yards away, quite a big farm, with long single-story buildings: Groux's place.

January 15th . . . 1:00 p.m. sharp at the place known as La Mulatière, sale by auction . . . farm, equipment, and stock . . . farm machinery, furniture, china . . . The transaction will be by cash.

That is how it had all started. For years life at the inn had been the same every evening. Old Nicholas would arrive, always half drunk, and before he settled down with his pint, he would go over for a drink at the bar. Then Groux would arrive from his farm. Thérèse would spread a red cloth on the table, and bring the cards and the counters. They still had to wait for the excise man to make the fourth; if he didn't turn up, Julia took his place.

Now, on the 14th, the eve of the sale, there were two other customers, farmers who had come from farther away—one of them a man called Borchain, from near Angoulême, the other a certain Canut, from Saint Jean-d'Angély.

"Just a minute," said Maigret, as the innkeeper was about to shuffle the cards. "Borchain went to bed before eight o'clock—that is to say, straight after his supper. Who took him to his room?"

"I did," Frédéric answered.

"He'd been drinking?"

"Not too much. A little, of course.

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He asked me who the chap was who looked so glum, and I told him it was Groux, the man whose property was going to be sold. . . Then he asked me how Groux had come to fail with such good land, and I—"

"That's enough of that," Groux groaned. The big fellow was in a gloomy mood. He refused to admit that he had never looked after his land and his beasts, and he blamed fate for his failure.

"All right! By that time who had seen his wallet?"

"All of us. He had taken it out of his pocket during the meal to show us a photograph of his wife, so we saw it was full of notes. Even if we hadn't seen them we would have known, as he had come with the intention of buying, and the sale had been advertised as a cash one."

"Same thing for you, Canut? You, too, had over a hundred thousand francs on you?"

"A hundred and fifty. I did not mean to go any higher."

Ever since his arrival there Maigret, who was at that time in charge of the flying squad at Nantes, had been studying Frédéric Michaux thoughtfully. Michaux, who was about 45, hardly looked like a country innkeeper, with his boxer's jersey and his broken nose.

"Tell me, don't you have the feeling we've seen one another before somewhere?"

"It's not worth beating about the bush—you're quite right, Inspector. But I'm going straight now."

Loitering with intent in the Ternes district of Paris, assault and battery, illegal bets, slot machines . . . In short, Frédéric Michaux, innkeeper at Pont-du-Grau in the depths of the Vendée, was better known to the police under the name of Fred the Boxer.

"You'll recognize Julia, too, no doubt. You put the two of us away ten years ago. But you can see she's a respectable woman now."

It was true. Bloated and flabby, blowsy, her hair greasy, shuffling back and forth between kitchen and dining room, Julia in no way resembled the girl of the Place des Ternes, and, what was more unexpected, she was a first-class cook.

"We brought Thérèse with us. She's an orphanage kid."

Eighteen years old, slim and tall, with a sharp nose and a funny little mouth, and a bold stare.

"Have we got to play cards in earnest?" asked the excise man, whose name was Gentil.

"Play as you did then. You, Canut, why haven't you gone to bed?"

"I was watching the game," the farmer muttered.

"Or, rather, he kept running after me," snapped Thérèse, "making me promise to go to his room afterwards."

Maigret noted that Fred threw a black look at the man, and that Julia was watching Fred.

Good, they were all in their places. And the other night it had

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been raining, too. Borchain's room was on the ground floor, at the far end of the passage. In that corridor there were three doors—one that led into the kitchen, another that opened onto the cellar stairs, and a third numbered 100.

Maigret sighed and ran his hand wearily over his brow. In the three days he had been there, the smell of the place had been soaking into him; the atmosphere clung to his skin until it sickened him. And yet what else could he do?

A little before midnight on the 14th, while the card game was going on quietly, Fred had sniffed once or twice, and shouted to Julia in the kitchen, "Is there something burning on the stove?"

He had got up and opened the door into the passage.

"Heavens, it reeks of burning out here!"

Groux had followed him, and Thérèse, too. It was coming from Borchain's room. The proprietor had banged on the door, then he had opened it, for it had no lock.

It was the mattress that was smoldering, a wool mattress, which gave off an acrid fatty smell. On the bed, in shirt and drawers, Borchain lay stretched out, his skull smashed in.

Then the telephone. At one in the morning Maigret had been roused. By four he was arriving, in the middle of a downpour, his nose red with cold, his hands frozen.

Borchain's wallet had disappeared. The window of the room was closed. No one could have come in from outside, for Michaux had a disagreeable Alsatian dog.

Impossible to arrest them all. They were all under suspicion, except Canut, the only one who had not left the inn parlor the whole evening.

"Come, now, my friends! I'm listening to you, and I'm watching. Do exactly what you did at this time on the 14th."

The sale had been postponed to a later date. All day on the 15th people had been passing up and down in front of the house, whose doors the Inspector had had closed.

Now it was the 16th. Maigret had hardly left the room, except to get a few hours' sleep. The same for the rest of them. They were sick to death of seeing each other from morning to night, of hearing the same questions over and over again, of going through the same actions time after time.

Julia was cooking. The rest of the world was forgotten. It was hard to realize that there were people in other places, in the towns, who were not saying the same things over and over, endlessly. "Let's see . . . I had just cut hearts . . . Groux threw down his hand, saying: 'It's not worth playing—I haven't a single card. Just my luck!' He got up—"

"Get up, Groux," ordered Maigret, "just as you did that night."

The big man shrugged. "How

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many more times are you going to send me along that corridor?" he grumbled. "Ask Frédéric—ask Nicholas—don't I go along there at least twice most evenings? Eh? What do you think I do with the four or five bottles of white wine I drink during the day?"

He spat, went toward the door, slouched along the passage, and banged open the door marked 100 with his fist. "There! Have I got to stay here, at this time of night?"

"As long as necessary, yes. Now, what did the rest of you do while he was out?"

The excise man laughed nervously at Groux's show of temper, and his laughter sounded forced. He was the least tough of them all. It was as if his nerves were too near the surface.

"I said to Gentil and Nicholas that no good would come of it," said Fred.

"No good would come of what?"

"Groux and his farm. He never really believed the sale would take place. He was sure he would find some way to borrow the money. When they came to put up the notice he threatened the bailiff with his gun. At his age, when you've always been your own master, it's not easy to go back to being somebody else's farmhand."

Groux had come back without a word and was looking at them balefully.

"Now what?" he shouted. "Have you got it all fixed? Was it me who killed him and set fire to the mattress? Say so now, and chuck me into prison! Having got this far—"

"Where were you Julia?" Maigret asked. "It seems to me you're not where you should be."

"I was cleaning the vegetables in the kitchen. We were expecting a lot of people to lunch because of the sale. I had ordered two legs of mutton, and we've only just finished one of them now."

"And you, Thérèse?"

"I went up to my room—"

"When, exactly?"

"A little after Monsieur Groux came back."

"All right, we'll go up together. The rest of you carry on—you started playing again?"

"Not right away—Groux didn't want to. We talked. I went to get a packet of cigarettes from the bar."

"Come along, Thérèse."

The room where Borchain had died was certainly strategically placed. The staircase was barely six feet away, so Thérèse could have—

A narrow room, an iron bed, clothes and underwear on a chair.

"What did you come up for?"

"To write."

"To write what?"

"That we certainly wouldn't have a moment alone together the next day." She was looking him straight in the eye, defiantly. "You know very well what I'm talking about—I could tell from the looks you gave me and from your questions. The

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old woman suspects something. She's always on top of us. I begged Fred to take me away, and we had made up our minds to clear off in the spring—"

"Why the spring?"

"I don't know—Fred fixed the date. We were to go to Panama, where he once lived, and open a bistro."

"How long did you stay in your *room?*"

"Not long. I heard the old woman coming upstairs. She asked me what I was doing. I answered, 'Nothing.' She hates me and I hate her—I'd swear she suspected what we were planning."

And Thérèse returned Maigret's gaze. She was a girl who knew what she wanted, and she wanted it badly.

"You don't think Julia would rather see Fred in prison than have him go off with you?"

"She's capable of it!"

"What was she going to her room for?"

"To take off her girdle. She has to wear a rubber one to keep what's left of her figure."

Thérèse's pointed teeth reminded him of some small animal; she had the same unfeeling cruelty. Her lips curled as she spoke of the woman who had preceded her in Fred's affections.

"In the evenings, especially when she has eaten too much—it's revolting how she stuffs herself!—her girdle kills her, and she goes upstairs to take it off . . ."

"How long did she stay?"

"Maybe ten minutes. When she came down again I helped her with the vegetables. The others were still playing cards."

"The door was open between the kitchen and the parlor?"

"It's always open."

Maigret gave her a last look, then tramped heavily down the creaking stairs. From the courtyard came the sound of the dog pulling at its chain.

Just behind the cellar door was a heap of coal, and it was there that the murder weapon had been found —a heavy coal hammer.

No fingerprints. The killer must have picked up the tool with a cloth. Through the rest of the house, including the doorknob of Borchain's room, there were innumerable blurred prints belonging to all those who were present on the night of the 17th.

As for the wallet, ten of them had looked for it, even in the unlikeliest places—all men accustomed to searches of this kind—and the day before the Sanitary Department had been called in to drain the cesspool.

The unfortunate Borchain had come from his place to buy Groux's farm. Until then he had been only a farmer who rented land; he wanted to become a landowner. He was married and had three daughters. He had had dinner at one of the tables. He had chatted with Canut, who was another prospective

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buyer. He had shown his wife's photograph.

Weighed down with too heavy a meal and too much to drink, he had made for bed, the way country people do when they feel sleep coming on. No doubt he had slipped the wallet under his pillow.

In the inn parlor, four men playing *belote*, as on any other evening, and drinking white wine: Fred, Groux, old Nicholas, whose face turned purplish when he had drunk his fill, and the excise man Gentil, who would have been better off doing his rounds.

Behind them, straddling a chair, Canut, dividing his attention between the cards and Thérèse, in the hope that this night of his away from home would be marked by some adventure.

In the kitchen, two women: Julia and the young girl from the orphanage, at work on a pail of vegetables.

One of these people, at a given moment, went into the passage on some pretext or other, opened first the cellar door, to take out the coal hammer, and then Borchain's door.

No one had heard anything. It could not have taken long as nobody had noticed any lengthy absence—even though the murderer had also taken time to put the wallet in a safe place, for, as the mattress was set on fire, it would not be long before the alarm was given. They would telephone the police, and each of them would be searched.

"When I think," Maigret said plaintively on returning to the parlor, "that you haven't even any decent beer—" A glass of cool, frothy beer straight from the barrel, instead of these contemptible bottles of so-called family brew . . .

"How about the card game?"

Fred looked at the time on the clock with its sky-blue pottery frame and its advertising slogan. He was used to the police; he was tired, like the others, but rather less strung up.

"Twenty to ten—not started yet. We were still talking. It was you, Nicholas, who wanted more wine?"

"That's possible."

"I called through to Thérèse, 'Go and draw some wine.' Then I got up and went down to the cellar myself."

"Why?"

He paused, then shrugged. "Oh, well, can't be helped. What does it matter if she does hear it, after all? When all this is over, life won't carry on as it was before, anyway. I had heard Thérèse go to her room. I thought she had probably left me a note. It would be put in the keyhole of the cellar door. Do you hear, Julia? I can't help it, old girl. The few happy moments we've spent together have been more than paid for by your endless scenes."

Canut reddened. Only Nicholas sniggered into his ginger whiskers. Monsieur Gentil averted his eyes,

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for he, too, had often made a pass at Thérèse.

"Was there a note?" Maigret asked.

"Yes. I read it down there while the bottle was filling. All Thérèse said was we probably wouldn't have a moment by ourselves the next day."

Strange, but one sensed real feeling in Fred, and even a totally unexpected depth of emotion. In the kitchen Thérèse got up suddenly and came toward the card table.

"Haven't you had enough?" she said, with trembling lips. "I'd rather they arrested us all and put us in prison. It would soon—but to go round and round like this, as if—as if—" She burst out sobbing, and ran over to bury her head in her arms against the wall.

"So you stayed in the cellar for several minutes?" Maigret went on imperturbably.

"Three or four minutes, yes," Fred replied.

"What did you do with the note?"

"I burned it in the candle."

"Are you afraid of Julia?"

Fred strongly resented Maigret's question. "Surely you understand? You who arrested us ten years ago—don't *you* understand that when one's been through a lot together . . . Anyway, have it your own way. Don't you upset yourself, Julia dear."

And a calm voice came from the kitchen: "I'm not upset."

As for motive—the classic motive that all the lectures on criminology stress—each one of these people had a motive. Groux even more than the others, as he was at the end of his tether, about to be sold out the day after, thrown from his house and home without even furniture or belongings, and with no alternative but to hire himself out as a laborer. He knew the inn well—the way to the cellar, the coal, the hammer . . .

And Nicholas—an old drunk, certainly, but he was penniless. Although he had a daughter in service at Niort, all her earnings went to the upkeep of her child. So couldn't he have . . . ? Besides, as Fred had just said, it was Nicholas who came in each week to chop the wood and break the coal.

Now, at about ten, Nicholas had gone along the passage, zigzagging drunkenly. Gentil had said, "Hope he doesn't mistake the door." It was an extraordinary coincidence: why had Gentil, sitting there, shuffling the cards mechanically, suddenly said that?

And why shouldn't Gentil have had the idea of committing the crime himself when a few moments later he followed in Nicholas' footsteps? Granted he was an excise officer, but everyone knew he didn't take that very seriously; he did his rounds at the café table, and was always ready to come to an arrangement . . .

"Listen, Inspector—" Fred started.

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"One moment. It's five past ten. Where had we reached the other night?"

At that Thérèse, who was still sniffling, came and sat down behind Fred, her shoulder touching his back.

"You were sitting there?" Maigret asked.

"Yes. I had finished the vegetables. I took up the sweater I was knitting, but I didn't do any of it."

Julia was still in the kitchen, but she couldn't be seen.

"What was it you wanted to say, Fred?" Maigret asked.

"Just an idea—it seems to me there's one point that proves it wasn't one of us who killed him, because—suppose—no, that's not what I mean. If I killed someone in my house, do you think I'd start a fire? What for? To draw attention?"

Maigret had just filled his pipe, and was taking his time over lighting it. "I think I'll have a calvados, after all, Thérèse," he said. "Now, Fred, why wouldn't you start a fire?"

"Well, because—" Fred was struck dumb. "If that fire hadn't started, we wouldn't have worried about the fellow. The others would have gone home and—"

Maigret smiled; the stem of his pipe stretched his mouth into an odd grin. "A pity you're proving exactly the opposite of what you wanted to prove, Fred. The start of that fire was the only real clue—it struck me immediately. Suppose you do kill the old man, as you say. Everyone knows he's at your place, so you wouldn't dream of disposing of the body. The next morning you will be compelled to open the door of his room and raise the alarm. When did he in fact ask to be called?"

"Six o'clock. He wanted to go over the farm and the fields before the sale."

"So if the body had been found at six o'clock, there would be no one in the house but you, Julia, and Thérèse—I don't include Monsieur Canut, whom no one would have suspected. Nor would anyone have thought the crime could have been committed during the card game."

Fred was following the Inspector's reasoning carefully, and it seemed to Maigret that he had grown paler. He even tore a playing card absently into bits and dropped the pieces on the floor.

"Look what you're doing! Next time you try to play, you'll have a hard time finding the ace of spades. What was I saying? Ah, yes. How could one make sure the crime was discovered *before* the departure of Groux, Nicholas, and Monsieur Gentil, so that suspicion might also fall on them? No reason for going into Borchain's room. Except one—the fire."

This time Fred shot to his feet, fists clenched, grim-faced. "In heaven's name!" he shouted.

There was dead silence; they were shocked to the core. They had be-

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come so exhausted that they had gradually ceased to believe in the murderer. They no longer grasped that he was there, in the inn, talking to them, eating at the same table with them, perhaps playing cards with them, and raising his glass to them.

Fred strode up and down the parlor. Maigret seemed to have sunk into himself, his eyes almost closed; he wondered if he was going to succeed at last. For three days he had kept them on the go, hour after hour, making them repeat ten times over the same actions, the same words, partly in the hope that a forgotten detail would suddenly emerge, but above all to wear them down, to push the murderer to breaking point.

"The whole thing—" his voice was quiet, the words punctuated by little puffs on his pipe—"hangs on knowing who had a safe enough hiding place for the wallet never to be found."

Everyone had been searched. One after the other, that first night, they had been stripped stark naked. The coal behind the cellar door had been searched through. The walls had been tapped, and the casks sounded. In spite of that, a fat wallet holding more than a hundred thousand-franc notes—

"You're making me dizzy, Fred, going round and round like that."

"But, for heaven's sake, don't you understand—"

"Understand what?"

"That I didn't kill him! I'm not fool enough for that—me with a police record long enough to—"

"It was in the spring you meant to take Thérèse to South America and buy a bistro?"

Fred glanced toward the kitchen door. "So what?" he asked through clenched teeth.

"Where was the money coming from?"

Fred's eyes bored into Maigret's. "So that's what you're getting at! You're on the wrong tack, Inspector. I'll have money on the fifteenth of May. It was a comfortable little idea that came to me when I was doing nicely as a boxing promoter. I took out an insurance policy for a hundred thousand francs to mature at the age of fifty. I shall be fifty on the fifteenth of May—ah, yes, Thérèse, I'm a bit longer in the tooth than I usually let on."

"Julia knew about this insurance?"

"That's nothing to do with a woman."

"So, Julia, you *didn't* know Fred was coming into a hundred thousand francs?"

"I knew."

"What?" Fred started.

"I also knew he wanted to go off with that trashy little—"

"And you would have let them go?"

Julia stayed quite still, her gaze fixed on Fred; there was a strange calm about her.

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"You haven't answered me," Maigret persisted.

She turned her gaze on him. Her lips moved, perhaps she was going to say something important—but instead she shrugged. "Can you ever tell what a man will do?"

Fred was not listening. He looked as if he was suddenly preoccupied with something else. Brows furrowed, he was deep in thought, and Maigret had the impression that they were thinking along the same lines.

"Well, now, Fred?"

"What?" It was as if he had been jolted out of a dream.

"About this insurance policy—this policy that Julia saw without your knowing—I'd also like to take a look at it."

How oddly the truth can come to light! Maigret was sure he had thought of everything. Thérèse told him in her room about the departure, therefore there had to be money. Fred confessed to the existence of an insurance policy. And now—it was so simple, so obvious, that he almost burst out laughing—the inn had been combed ten times over but no insurance policy had been found, no identity papers, no military service record.

"As you like, Inspector," Fred answered calmly with a sigh. "At least you'll be able to see how much I've saved up." He went toward the kitchen.

"You can come in. When one lives at the back of beyond like this . . . Not to mention some papers I have that my pals from the old days wouldn't mind pinching."

Thérèse followed them, astonished. Groux's heavy footsteps could be heard, and Canut getting up.

"Don't think this is anything special," Fred went on. "I just happen to have been a coppersmith in my young days."

To the right of the kitchen stove there was an enormous garbage can of galvanized iron. Fred emptied the contents out right in the middle of the floor, and released the concealed double bottom in its base.

He was the first to look inside. Slowly a frown spread over his face. Slowly he raised his head; his mouth hung open.

Lying there, among other papers, was a bulging wallet, grubby with use and held together with a band of red rubber cut from an inner tube.

"*Well, Julia?*" Maigret asked softly.

Then, it seemed to him, through the woman's flabby features he saw a flash of the old Julia. She glanced round at them all, and her upper lip curled disdainfully. She looked as if the tears were not far away, but they did not come. Her voice was flat when she spoke. "Well, that's that. I'm done for."

The extraordinary thing was that it was Thérèse who suddenly burst into tears, like a dog howling in the presence of death. Meanwhile,

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the woman who had done the killing asked, "I suppose you're taking me off straight away? As you have the car? Can I bring my things?"

Maigret let her pack her bits and pieces. He felt sad—reaction, after prolonged nervous tension.

How long, he wondered, had Julia known about Fred's secret hiding place? On seeing the insurance policy, which he had never told her about, she must have realized that the day the money came he would be off with Thérèse.

Then came her chance—more money even than Fred would be getting. And she would be the one who would bring it to him, a few days or a few weeks after the police investigation was finished—*Look, Fred, I know everything. You wanted to go away with her, didn't you? You thought I was no good any more. Take a look in your hiding place—it's your old girl who . . .*

Maigret kept close watch over her as she moved about the bedroom where there was only a big mahogany bed and, above it, a photograph of Fred in boxing shorts. "Have to put my girdle on," she said. "You won't look, will you? It's not very pretty."

It was not until she was in the car that she broke down. Maigret kept his eyes fixed on the raindrops sliding down the windows. He wondered what the others were doing now, back at the inn. And who would get Groux's farm when the auctioneer's voice rang out—going, going, gone!—and the hammer fell.

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At Brockport he studied English Literature under James Edmunds, who had more influence on Mr. Brittain's own teaching career than any other person; it is no surprise, therefore, that quite a bit of James Edmunds—intellectually, not physically—has crept into the characterization of Mr. Strang.

After two years of teaching in LeRoy, New York, Mr. Brittain became a teacher in Lawrence, Long Island, and has been there for the past twelve years, six of them as an English teacher in Lawrence Junior High School. During this time he got his M.S. degree from Hofstra University, and in his spare (!) time he reads nearly every mystery he can get his hands on—and, of course, has begun to write them on his own . . .

We expect Mr. Brittain's new series—surely Mr. Strang will be back!—to be as fascinating as his recent series of pastiches on the works of John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen, Rex Stout, and Agatha Christie . . .

MR. STRANG GIVES A LECTURE

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

DETECTIVE PAUL ROBERTS walked along the third floor hallway of Aldershot High School, glancing at each door as he passed it. As a county detective, he'd been in the school before, checking on students who were in trouble; but this was the first time he'd got beyond the principal's office and up to the classrooms.

The building was quiet now that the Friday dismissal bell had rung,

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and only some crumpled homework papers and a locker door hanging open gave evidence that a few minutes earlier 1700 teen-agers had charged toward the exit doors and a week-end of freedom like lemmings returning to the sea.

Although the hallway in which Detective Roberts found himself was a relatively modern addition to the building, the ubiquitous smell of chalk dust and floor wax brought back memories of his own schooldays at P.S. 189. He looked furtively about, half expecting one of his old teachers to stick her head out of a doorway and tell him to tuck his shirt tail in.

He stopped in front of Room 319. A plastic sign on the door read *SCIENCE*, and below that, *Mr. Strang*. With a chuckle Roberts noted that someone had scrawled *is a fink* after the name.

Roberts, who spent much of his off-duty time organizing the Aldershot Police Boys Club, had heard of Mr. Strang. To some boys he was a holy terror, and they considered the student lucky who could get through all four years of high school without being assigned to one of Mr. Strang's classes. Other students spoke of the teacher in the reverent tones usually reserved for discussions concerning hot rods or the newest dance. Roberts had yet to find the youth who was neutral on the subject. But everyone admitted that Aldershot High School without Mr. Strang was as unimaginable as a boy who didn't want his driver's license on the morning of his sixteenth birthday.

The county detective opened the door and stepped inside. The room, with its demonstration stand, sink, and Bunsen burner, was about what he had expected. The movable desks and chairs were in neat rows, and along the shelves by the windows were hamster cages and aquariums filled with green scum.

"Be with you in a minute."

Roberts glanced around the room, trying to find where the voice had come from. Finally he looked behind the door he had just entered. The man standing there had his back to Roberts. He wore an old lab coat which hung limply from narrow shoulders, and the hair on the back of his head was getting thin.

The man was working on some project that required a complicated tangle of glass tubing. Roberts saw him raise a test tube containing brown powder, measure the powder with his eye, then pour the powder into a cone of filter paper. Finally he set the cone in a glass funnel and poured a clear liquid over it. Roberts was reminded of an old movie scene in which Dr. Jekyll was just about to be transformed into Mr. Hyde.

Then the man turned around and peered at Roberts, pushing black-rimmed glasses up onto a forehead made even more impressive by a receding hairline. "I'm sorry," he said. "I thought you were one of my students. You're a parent?"

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"Yeah, I've got a little girl, three years old," said the detective before he realized why the question had been asked. He took his badge and identification out of a hip pocket. "Detective Bureau," he continued tersely. "Official business. I'm looking for a Mr. Strang—Mr. Leonard Strang."

The man reached out a slender hand and grasped the flask containing the brown liquid which had dripped through the filter paper. He put the flask to his lips and took a long swallow. "I'm Mr. Strang," he said.

Roberts found it difficult to associate this thin, soft-spoken man with the terrible and wonderful Mr. Strang he had heard so much about. He began to wonder if the brown liquid did, after all, have some effect on Mr. Strang's personality.

Mr. Strang held out the flask to the detective. "Can I offer you some coffee?" he asked. Roberts shook his head, feeling relieved somehow to know what the teacher was drinking.

"Then perhaps you'd tell me," Mr. Strang continued, "what your business with me is. My principal, Mr. Guthrey, warned me against cutting across the grass in front of the school, but isn't calling in a detective a little extreme?"

Roberts looked at the teacher, who was waiting for an answer with an expression of curiosity on his face. The detective suddenly and illogically began to feel like a small boy in short pants who has just committed an infraction of the school rules. It would not have surprised him at all if Mr. Strang ordered him to remain after school.

"Do you know a kid named Julius Malesco?" Roberts asked gruffly, trying to regain control of himself.

"Yes, I have him in one of my classes. Here at school we call him Beanie."

"What can you tell me about him?"

"Off the record?"

"Off the record."

Mr. Strang carefully removed his glasses from his forehead. He breathed on the lenses and then polished them on his necktie. Roberts could almost see the teacher arranging his mental notes in proper order. One hand was carefully inserted into a jacket pocket while the other made a jabbing motion with the glasses. Although the gestures were new to the detective, thousands of students from hundreds of classes knew what they meant. Mr. Strang was about to begin A Lecture.

"Beanie Malesco," Mr. Strang began musingly. "Beanie Malesco is what I'd consider a happy imbecile. He's well down in the bottom quarter of his class, and he seems not only content but pleased with that subterranean scholastic position. He does, however, seem to have an interest in cars which is abnormally strong even for a boy

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of his age. He wears his hair much too long for my taste, and he belongs to a gang called The Gear Grinders. I've taken a rather personal dislike to the boy's intentionally grubby appearance, but as far as I know, he's never been in any real trouble."

With a flick of his hand Mr. Strang replaced the glasses on his nose and removed the other hand from his pocket. The Lecture was over. "Why do you ask?"

"Because there was an armed robbery in a diner downtown late yesterday, and he's our chief suspect, that's why."

"I see . . . But what's that got to do with me?"

"Well—" Roberts swayed from one foot to the other as if he'd been caught cheating on an examination. "Mr. Strang, it kind of looks like you're the owner of the getaway car."

Roberts almost chuckled at the amazed expression on Mr. Strang's face. That should set the old boy back, Roberts thought. He kept looking at the teacher and could barely refrain from laughing. Those rather old-fashioned glasses, the stooped shoulders, the nervous interlacing of the hands—

"Amphineura!" shouted Mr. Strang suddenly.

"Look," said Roberts. "Don't get —"

"Scaphopoda!" snapped the teacher. "Gastropoda! Pelecypoda! Cephalopoda!"

"Mr. Strang, there might be some kids still in the building. You ought to watch your language."

Mr. Strang let out a long sigh. "Forgive me," he said. "But it's Friday, and I've had a long and tiring week. Right now my only desire is to get myself into a restful horizontal position. But it seems I'm about to have a rather eventful week-end.

"At any rate," he continued, "I doubt that any of my students would be offended by my recitation of the classes of the Phylum Mollusca."

"Huh?"

"A system of identifying animals in a scientific manner. There are certain similarities to the Bertillon system of human classification."

"Oh," said Roberts vaguely.

"What do I do now?" asked Mr. Strang. "Call a lawyer? Would it help if I told you that yesterday afternoon Beanie took my car to Lundeen's Service Station to grease it and put in antifreeze? Beanie works there after school, and he said he'd give my car special attention."

"We know that, Mr. Strang. Harvey Lundeen told us. We're not accusing you of anything. Malesco just used your car for the holdup, that's all."

"You know, Roberts, armed robbery doesn't seem to me to be in Beanie's line. Oh, I could possibly see him stealing something if the owner weren't present, but not

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holding another man at gunpoint. I assume that when you said 'armed robbery' you were referring to a gun?"

"Yeah, he had a gun. A revolver."

"No, that doesn't sound like Beanie at all. It's not that he's particularly honest—he's just cowardly. I wonder if I could see the boy."

"Not a chance, Mr. Strang. He's been assigned a lawyer who's keeping all visitors away from him. Besides, we're taking no chances on hurting this case because of some tricky legal angle when it finally comes up for trial."

"Trial? Won't Beanie be considered a juvenile offender?"

"Not any more. His birthday was last week."

"I see. But would it at least be possible for me to go down to Lundeen's to see my car? Surely I have a right to reclaim my own property."

"I guess that'll be all right. We're through checking it out."

Mr. Strang shrugged off his lab coat and took his hat from a hook behind the door. The casual observer might have assumed that Mr. Strang's battered felt hat had been frequently flung to the ground and stamped on during its owner's outbursts of frustration. The casual observer would have been entirely correct in that assumption.

A black and white police car was pulled up in front of the gas pumps when they arrived at the service station. Behind it, like a baby elephant following its mother, stood Mr. Strang's dusty, purple compact automobile. A large "Closed" sign hung on the station's front door.

As the detective and the teacher walked across the asphalt apron, a man came out of the station's small office and waved to Roberts. He was wearing a sports jacket of large red-and-white checks, and his necktie bore a hand-painted picture of a green palm tree. On his feet were sports shoes which, while run down at the heels, were heavily coated with a new layer of white polish. Roberts introduced the man to Mr. Strang as Harvey Lundeen, owner of the station.

"With all this excitement I'm takin' me a holiday," said Lundeen, grinning happily. "Any business I lose today I can make up with all the publicity I'll get out of this."

Mr. Strang fought back a desire to shade his eyes from the brilliant glare of Lundeen's attire. "Just to satisfy the curiosity of a customer, Mr. Lundeen," he said, "I wonder if you'd tell me just what happened last night."

"There ain't much I can tell you first-hand," said Lundeen. "I went home about six last night. I locked the tow truck and another car being repaired in the service shop and took the keys with me. There wasn't enough room for your car inside, so I left it out here. Anyway, I left young Malesco here to pump gas until nine. He couldn't get into the service shop, but there wasn't

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any reason for him to go in there. I guess that's why he took your car when he drove off."

"He drove off?" asked Mr. Strang. "Where?"

"To Gruderman's Diner," interrupted Roberts. "It's not very far from here. That's the place that was robbed."

Mr. Strang nodded. "I'm familiar with it," he said. "Since my car was involved, could I hear about the robbery itself?"

"Sure," said the detective. "Alvin Gruderman was the only one working there last night. He says that about nine thirty he was just getting ready to close up when this purple compact car pulled up into that narrow driveway that leads into the enclosed parking lot behind the diner. That driveway's real narrow, what with the diner on one side and a high wall on the other, and Al was afraid the guy was going to try and park there all night.

"So Al came out to tell him to move, because there wasn't enough room for anybody else to get by him. But when he got up beside the car, the man in it pulled a gun and forced Al back into the diner. Al remembers the man left the car with the motor running, so he must have been planning a fast getaway. He cleaned out the cash register, hit Al on the head with the gun, backed his car out, and took off. Al was out for almost half an hour."

"What led you to Beanie Malesco?" asked the science teacher. "Did Gruderman recognize him?"

"No, the man was masked. But he was wearing a leather jacket."

"So?"

"There was lettering on the back of it. It said *The Gear Grinders.*"

"That wasn't very smart of the criminal, was it?"

"Well, you said yourself Malesco isn't very bright. Anyway, we checked out all the members of The Gear Grinders and found out that Malesco worked here yesterday from right after school until nine o'clock. But he didn't get home until nearly one. Tried to tell us he took in a movie. We drove out here and looked around."

"Yeah, that's real gratitude for you," Lundeen growled. "I give the kid a job, figuring maybe it's a break for him, and anyway he can at least earn his pocket money. And he's not here two weeks before he steals a customer's car and pulls this job. Show Mr. Strang what you found on the front seat, Roberts."

The detective gave Mr. Strang a pale-yellow rectangular piece of paper. It was a check for $15 made out to Alvin Gruderman.

"We even talked to the man who wrote this," said Roberts. "He gave it to Gruderman about seven o'clock last night—Al often cashes small checks for his customers."

Mr. Strang returned the check to Roberts. "Is it all right if I look

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over my own car for damage?" he asked.

Roberts nodded, and Mr. Strang walked over to the purple car. As he stood contemplating a dirt-stained front fender, he pulled from his pocket a massive briar pipe and a pouch of tobacco. Ramming tobacco into the bowl, he applied a match and sent clouds of foul-smelling smoke out into the clear autumn air. Lundeen, who was downwind of the teacher, compared the smell with that of a burning tire, but Mr. Strang was too deep in thought to hear the comment.

He crawled in and about the car, examining the area under the seats and sighting along the body for any sign of a new dent. When he looked under the hood, his pipe still in his teeth, Roberts saw the huge volume of smoke pouring forth and wondered if the engine had caught on fire.

Finally, after a glance at the instruments on the dashboard and a slamming of both doors, Mr. Strang returned to where Roberts and Lundeen were talking to a bulky uniformed policeman who had come from inside the station office.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Strang, "but could you tell me how far Gruderman's Diner is from here?"

"About a mile, I'd say," Lundeen answered.

"Pardon my making sounds like a science teacher," replied Mr. Strang, "but I'd like it a little more precise than that. Could you possibly give me the exact distance?"

Roberts shrugged. "Bell," he said, turning to the policeman, "take another drive down to Gruderman's and back. Check the mileage—to the tenth of a mile. And bring Al Gruderman back with you. I may want to talk to him again."

Bell got into the police car and zoomed out onto the street in the direction of the diner. "I'm going inside," said Lundeen, heading for the office. "Call me if you need me."

Mr. Strang turned to the detective. "How much was stolen?" he asked.

"A little under five hundred dollars."

"Have you found any of it?"

"Nothing except that check. And Malesco couldn't cash it anyway. Don't worry, he won't get a chance to spend any of the money."

"Of course he won't. Because he didn't commit the robbery."

"What!"

Mr. Strang spread his hands and shrugged as if he were clearing up a simple point of general science for a not-too-bright student. "I said Beanie Malesco is innocent. At least, the evidence would tend to indicate that he is. Besides, I know the boy too well to think he'd be capable of clubbing a man with a gun."

Roberts angrily drove his right fist into the palm of his left hand. He had had enough of this—this schoolteacher!—who continually made him feel like an incompetent

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boy of twelve. Why couldn't he stick to his ivory tower, anyway? It was only with an effort that Roberts kept himself from shouting.

"Look, Mr. Strang, I've been pretty patient with you, bringing you down here, sending my man to check the mileage and all. But frankly, you're beginning to bug me. You teachers get a kid in school, give him a few tests, see him in class once a day, and all of a sudden you can tell whether or not he's a criminal. You—you *know* him! Phooey! I've got enough evidence on Malesco to—"

Mr. Strang just stared at the detective as if he were only a minor problem in classroom discipline. "What evidence?" he asked, enunciating carefully. "A man with a gun commits a robbery. And you pick up Beanie because the robber was wearing a leather jacket with *The Gear Grinders* on it. Give me a can of white paint, and I could provide myself with a jacket like that in a few minutes, and you know it.

"Besides, why would Beanie wear an incriminating jacket? He watches enough crime shows on TV to know better than that. If he wanted to get arrested, he could just as easily have left a calling card with his name and address on it."

As Roberts started to reply, the police car pulled up in front of the gas pumps, and Bell got out, accompanied by a small man with a bandaged head whom he introduced to Mr. Strang as Alvin Gruderman, owner of the diner. Gruderman mumbled a greeting and then shuffled off toward the office where he could sit down.

"Eight-tenths of a mile," said Bell. "That's how far it is to the diner."

"Interesting," said Mr. Strang. He motioned Roberts to the purple car and opened the left door, pointing to the door frame. "Recognize that?" he asked.

"Sure," said Roberts. The detective turned to Bell, who was trying to peer over his shoulder. "It's one of those stickers they put on a car after they grease it. It shows the mileage at the time of the lubricating job."

"Seven-six-two-four-one," read Bell, "and one-tenth."

"What are you getting at, Mr. Strang?" asked Roberts.

"Look at the speedometer."

"Uh huh. Seven-six-two-four-one and nine-tenths. The car was driven eight-tenths of a mile after the grease job. Just the distance to the diner."

Mr. Strang slapped the palm of one hand against his forehead. "I'll bet you were a real joy to your arithmetic teacher," he said to Roberts. "Never mind the new math. You can't even cope with the old kind. Doesn't all this suggest something to you?"

It was Bell who answered the question with one of his own. "I the car traveled eight-tenths of a

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mile *to* the diner," he said slowly, "how did it get back here?"

Roberts felt as if someone had slammed him across the back of the knees with a baseball bat. He sadly admitted to himself that he had overlooked the lubrication sticker and the speedometer in his examination of the car, and he thanked the gods who watch over detectives that he hadn't yet filed a report.

Mr. Strang was grinning from ear to ear. "If Beanie drove to the diner *and* back, there'd be another eight-tenths of a mile on the speedometer," he said. "The owner of the diner said that my car pulled up into the narrow driveway next to the diner. That uses up the eight-tenths of a mile. It's a simple question of distance."

"Maybe the speedometer isn't working properly," hazarded Roberts. "Or maybe Malesco turned it back some way." Then he saw Bell, who had helped him check the car, shaking his head.

"Do you still want to bet on Beanie's guilt?" asked Mr. Strang.

Roberts' face turned a shade that almost matched the color of Mr. Strang's car. "Bell!" he shouted. "Why didn't you—"

There was another shout from the door of the station office, and the owner, Lundeen, came running across the asphalt, his tie fluttering over his shoulder like the brilliant banner on a knight's lance.

"Mr. Roberts!" he called. "I just found this in the station. I'm afraid this really cooks Malesco's goose."

He handed the detective a small piece of paper. Roberts looked at it carefully. Then he smiled. Not only would the paper clinch the case against Malesco, but it would also quiet the babblings of the schoolteacher. "I'll just bet this is in Malesco's handwriting," he said. "And if it is, that just about makes *me* right and *you* wrong, Mr. Strang. What do you think of that?"

He thrust the paper into Mr. Strang's hand. The almost illegible handwriting on one side testified eloquently to Beanie Malesco's authorship. The few brief scrawls read:

al—in mr s car

"You see?" said the detective triumphantly. "Everybody calls Alvin Gruderman 'Al'—even the kids. The way I see it, this note proves that Malesco went to Al's diner in your car."

Mr. Strang read the note several times. The clouds of thick smoke still issuing from his pipe and the faraway look in his eyes indicated that the teacher was concentrating deeply. He turned the note upside down, and he peered at the reverse side of the paper.

Then the science teacher began to laugh.

"Hey, what's the matter, Mr. Strang?" asked Bell. "Have you flipped or something?"

"How many times," Mr. Strang chortled, his thin body shaking with merriment, "have I asked to be

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delivered from the functional illiterates I have in my classes? And now Beanie Malesco is going to be proved innocent just because he can't write decently! You say you just found this, Lundeen?"

"Well, it was actually Al Gruderman who found it. We were inside rehashing the robbery and he sort of absent-mindedly lifted up a road map from my desk. My memo pad was underneath, and this was written on the top sheet."

"I hope today will be a lesson to you, Roberts," said Mr. Strang, "not to equate the word 'teacher' with 'numbskull.' I told you Beanie was innocent, and I'm going to prove he is. Officer Bell, would you ask Mr. Gruderman to come out here, please?"

Bell went to the office and beckoned to the owner of the diner.

"Mr. Gruderman," said Mr. Strang, when they had returned, "tell me about that narrow driveway into your parking lot. Is it as narrow as the detective described it to me?"

"It sure is," said Gruderman. "It's got a high cement wall on one side, and the diner itself is on the other. Last year a car got stuck in there and nobody could get in or out for twenty minutes."

"Now you're absolutely sure my car is the one you saw the robber drive up in?"

"Mr. Strang," Roberts interrupted, "Al has already gone over that. It was *your* car that Malesco took— there's no possible question about it."

Mr. Strang merely nodded at the interruption and addressed another question to Gruderman. "When my car stopped—with the motor running—it completely blocked your driveway. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yep. There wasn't more than three feet of clearance on either side of the car, maybe not that much."

"Thank you," said Mr. Strang. He glanced quickly at Roberts, Bell, Lundeen, and Gruderman, as if to see that everyone was in place before The Lecture started. "I would like you all to give me your complete and undivided attention," he said. "Class is now in session, and I don't want you to miss a word."

Once again, Mr. Strang's black-rimmed glasses were polished on his necktie, and one hand was carefully inserted into a jacket pocket.

"Beanie Malesco," began Mr Strang, waving his glasses like a king's scepter, "is hard put to spel his own name correctly. Therefore, to hide his lack of ability, he abbreviates as often as possible, a the note indicates. Unfortunately he isn't aware that some word don't have abbreviated forms. Being a free spirit, he abbreviates them anyway. And being lazy, he omit the periods.

"Now when I gave my car to Beanie to bring down here, I asked him to lubricate it and put in anti

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freeze. But none of that expensive antifreeze for me—a schoolteacher can't afford it.

"It's my opinion that he brought the car here and drained the radiator, but then became too busy to fill it again. So he wrote a note to remind himself to do it later. What I suspect happened was that before he got around to filling the radiator, Lundeen closed the doors of the repair shop, locking all the cans of antifreeze inside.

"That's the significance of the note, Roberts. Even Beanie wouldn't leave written plans of a robbery where they were sure to be found. In that note—*al—in mr s car*—he was merely reminding himself not to forget to put *al*cohol in Mr. Strang's car."

"But we took Malesco in this morning before he came down here," said Roberts. "That means your car radiator ought to still be empty."

"The evidence certainly points in that direction. Suppose we put your hypothesis to the test. Would you please do the honors, Officer Bell?"

Bell trotted over to Mr. Strang's car, a sheepish expression on his face, and lifted the hood. He unscrewed the radiator cap and flashed his light inside. Then he bent down under the car.

"Dry as a bone," he said finally.

"It seems that in your eagerness to convict Beanie, you overlooked several pieces of evidence in my car," said Mr. Strang to the county detective.

"But your car couldn't have traveled that far with a dry radiator," said Roberts. "Isn't that right, Lundeen?"

"Yeah, the pistons would have expanded with the heat and jammed in the cylinders." Lundeen looked down in annoyance at a spot of grease that marred the gleam of his freshly polished white shoes.

"Exactly," said Mr. Strang, "My car was driven almost a mile to the diner. Then, according to Mr. Gruderman, the criminal left the motor running while he went inside, rifled the cash register, and knocked Gruderman out. What's the logical conclusion?"

"Why, the heat must have jammed up that motor while it was right there in my driveway," said Gruderman, fingering the bandage on his head.

"Go to the head of the class," said Mr. Strang.

"Then how did the car get back here?" asked the detective.

"I'm more interested in 'why' than 'how'," replied Mr. Strang.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Roberts.

"Consider for a moment all the things we're forced to believe if we assume that Beanie is guilty. Would Beanie Malesco be stupid enough to wear his Gear Grinders jacket after taking the trouble to put on a mask? Would he be stupid enough to overlook a check that would

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prove my car was used in the robbery?"

"Are you telling us that Malesco was framed?" asked Roberts.

"Answer your own question," said Mr. Strang. "If the car was left in Gruderman's driveway, Beanie could always claim it was stolen. But no, the robber takes great pains to make sure it is returned here to the station. What possible motive could there be for that except to lead the police directly to Beanie?"

"But how did the robber get the car back here from the diner?" snapped Roberts. "And why didn't the added distance register on the speedometer? Did the guy carry it on his back?"

"No, but curiously enough you're getting warm." Mr. Strang smiled.

"Well, he couldn't get another car to push him, that's a cinch—no other car could have gotten past him in that driveway. And I can't see anybody shoving a car for almost a mile with his shoulder. What that guy really needed was a tow truck."

"Eureka! At last a little common sense is beginning to reveal itself."

"What?"

"Of course—you've hit it. The robber backed a tow truck up to the rear of the car—he couldn't reach the front that was pointing to the enclosed parking space. He lifted the rear wheels off the ground and towed the car back to the station. That's why the added distance didn't register on the speedometer. Since the instrument is connected to the rear wheels, it wouldn't register while those wheels were in the air."

"And just where is this character going to get a tow truck?" asked Bell.

"Gruderman was knocked out for almost half an hour, remember? That would give a man enough time to run back here get the tow truck from the repair shop—"

"Hey, wait a minute!" Roberts bellowed. "The only person who could have gotten to that tow truck was—"

"—was the same man who would have had plenty of opportunities to examine Beanie's jacket and make himself a copy," said Mr. Strang. "Especially since he obviously had access to white shoe polish for painting on the letters. The man who did all he could to frame Beanie under the guise of giving him a job. The man—the only man—who could have opened the shop where the tow truck was kept, because as the owner he was the only person with a key."

As Mr. Strang slipped his glasses back on, indicating that The Lecture was finished, there was a brief scuffling sound which ended abruptly as Bell's fist scored a bull's-eye on the center button of a brightly colored sports jacket.

"Lundeen," said Mr. Strang, gazing down at the figure lying on

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the asphalt, "will you go along quietly, or shall I have the pleasure of watching Officer Bell jump up and down on your supine body?"

As Roberts got into the police car with Bell to take Lundeen away, the county detective turned to the thin, stooped schoolteacher. "Malesco will be glad to hear he's been cleared," he said. "Maybe he'll even get a haircut out of gratitude."

"By the way," he continued, "after all your car's been through, you'll probably be wanting another one. Now I've got a brother who's in the used car business—"

"Sell my car? Never!" Mr. Strang exclaimed. "Where would I get another vehicle that was owned only by a little old schoolteacher?"

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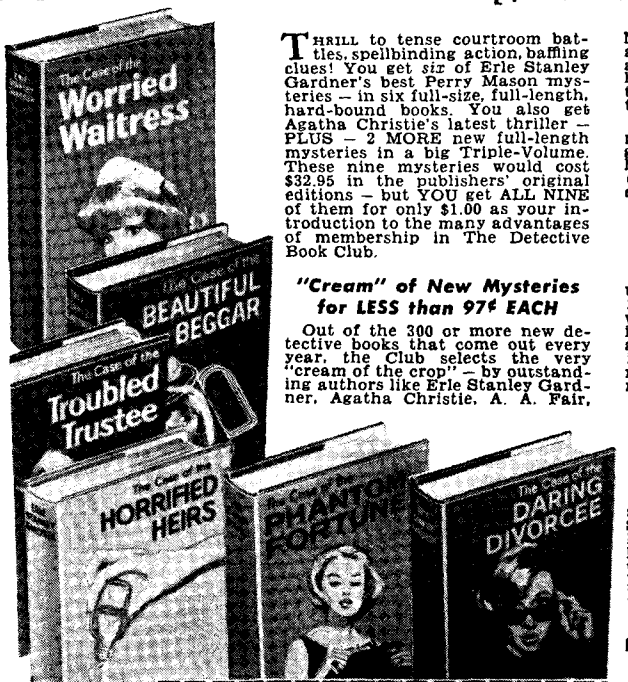
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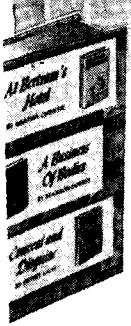

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